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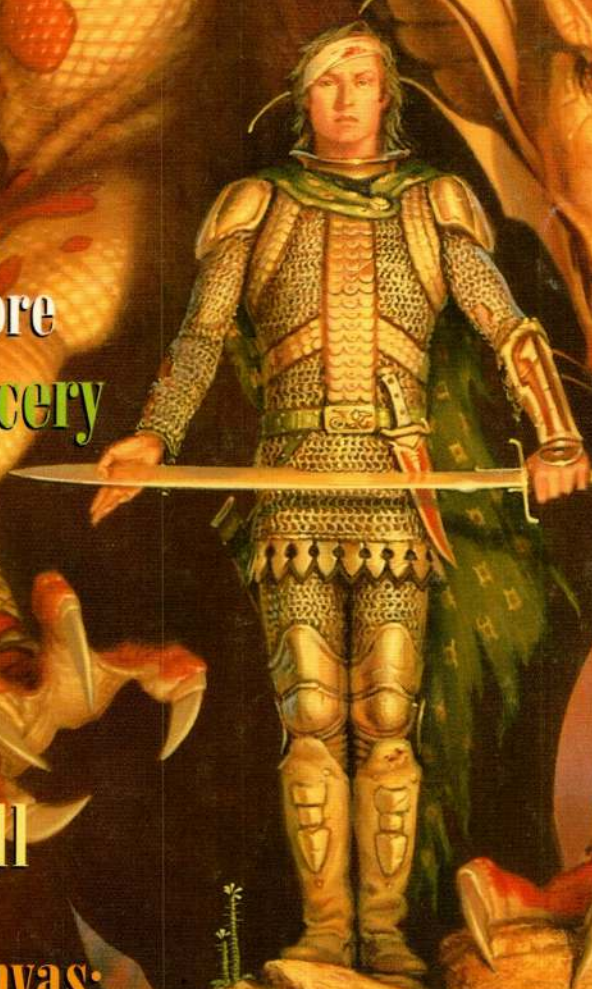
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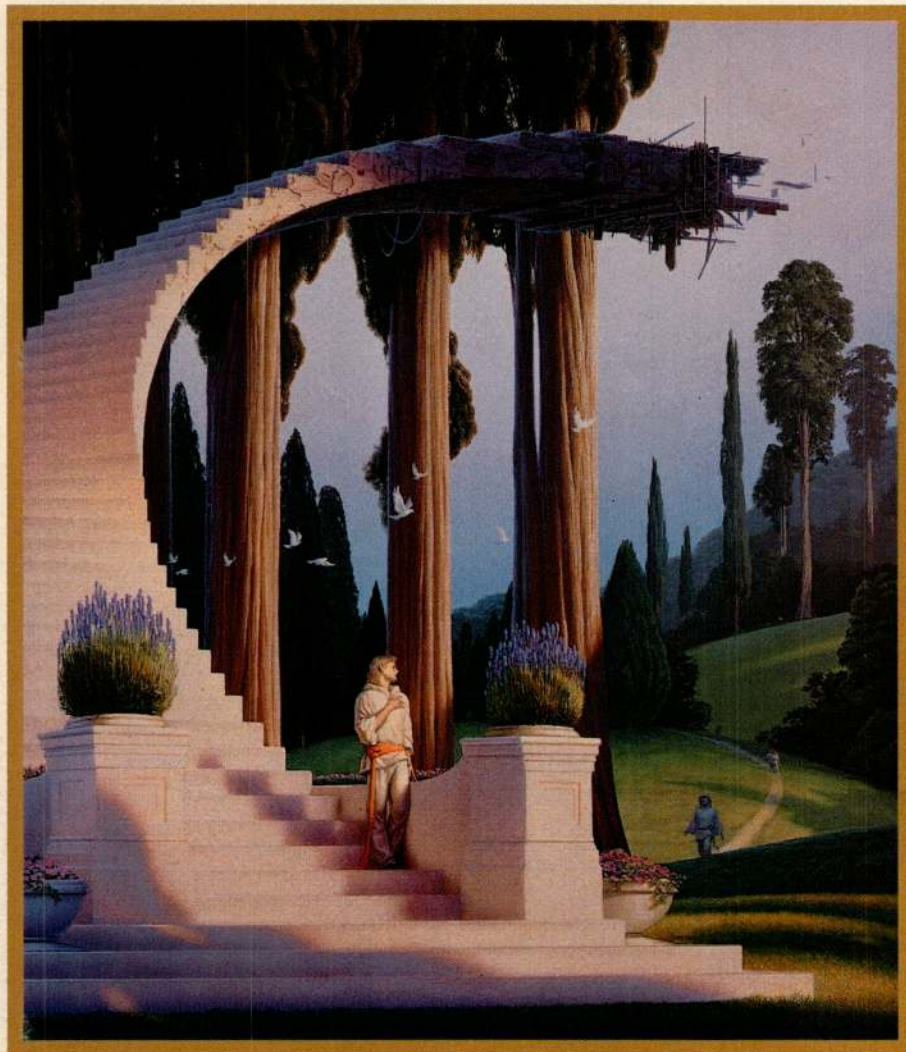


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COVER: From somewhere within the realms of fantasy a warrior is seen with his faithful dragon. Painting by Michael Whelan. ABOVE: Hestia is one of the enchanted canvases of Brian Froud, to be found in our Gallery section, beginning on page 78.

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Thief Of Baghdad

This story of pure fantasy in the best Arabian Night's tradition is a favorite. Sabu stars as the cunning young thief of Baghdad who encounters evil spells, magic carpets and endless adventures. Made in 1940, the special effects still hold up to today's standards. (Color)
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BY SHAWNA MCCARTHY

Let's draw the proverbial line in the dust between fantasy and science fiction.

WELCOME TO THE FIRST ISSUE OF *REALMS OF FANTASY*. GIVEN THAT THIS IS THE first issue, there's actually a chance some of you might be reading this, as opposed to six issues down the line when you'll all be saying, "Who cares what McCarthy has to say? Get to the fiction!" So, given that this is my best (and perhaps only) chance to introduce myself and the wonderful new magazine you hold in your hands, I think I'll take full advantage of the opportunity.

First off, who am I? Well, I'm a long-time lover of creative and innovative science fiction and fantasy (though for our purposes only the fantasy part counts). I've worked in the industry for nearly 17 years and have published, in one format or another, most of the major names in the field. I was the editor of a competing magazine for some time, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, for which I won a Hugo Award for Best Professional Editor. From there I moved to Bantam Spectra Books, and from there to maternity. (Sorry, I couldn't resist.) After a few blissful and diaper-filled years, I returned to the publishing fold as a literary agent with a highly respected firm, a full-time position which I still hold. So...if you send me a story or a letter and you don't get a response overnight, do keep in mind that I have two children, two jobs, two cats, one fish, one husband and one seriously overworked computer.

Enough about me (some might say far too much, in fact). What's the deal with this magazine? Well, this gorgeous artifact is brought to you under the auspices of the fine people who bring you the only full-color glossy science fiction magazine in the world, *Science Fiction Age*. What we hope to do, obviously, with *Realms of Fantasy* is duplicate this highly successful format in the fantasy genre.

But, you might ask, what exactly is the fantasy genre and how does it differ from science fiction? Good question, and one which has been bandied about in our industry for many years. Many people like to be very strict about their delineations: Fantasy has magic, science fiction has science, and that's that. Or is it?

I bring this point up because shortly after I opened the magazine to submissions, I posted a notice on the online service I belong to asking the many science fiction and fantasy writers who hang out there to send me stories. I worded my request thusly: "I do not want to see standard SF. This means no alien worlds, no hard-edged technology, no FTL drives, etc." These being *writers* I was addressing, I should have been ready for the storm of controversy this notice blew up. (In these circles, a question about the time of day can arouse controversy.) What did I mean, no hard-edged technology? Would I turn down a classic like Terry Bisson's *Talking Man* because it had cars in it? No FTL drives? Many fine writers have posited all sorts of fantastic dreamscapes arising from human bodies attempting to travel faster than light. No alien worlds? How Earth-centric of me—who am I to say that distant planets don't have mythologies of their own, and why wouldn't I want stories about them?

Of course I'd love to publish something as marvelous as Terry's classic and I'm sure there's wonderful off-planet fantasy to be written as well. The point is, though, this is an immensely subjective area, and we all have our own boundaries over which we do not step. Mine are drawn very faintly in the dust, I will admit, but they are there nonetheless. Defining them, however, and thus what you can expect to find in this and future issues of this magazine is somewhat difficult. After some thought, I think I've come up with a working personal definition of the difference between science fiction and fantasy: at the heart of all good science fiction lies *order*—the explainable, the reproducible, the predictable. At the heart of all good fantasy lies *chaos*—the inexplicable, the irreproducible, the completely, utterly and totally unpredictable. And that, I think, is not only a pretty good predictor of what you might find in these pages, but it's also a pretty good answer to the age old question.

Next issue: The Chicken or The Egg? See you then, and be careful reading this magazine: it's unpredictable.

At the heart of fantasy lies chaos... the utterly unpredictable. When Everything was Ready Down Came the Trolls. Art by Reginald L. Knowles.



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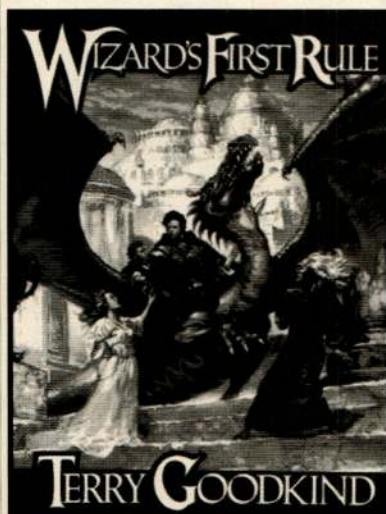
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tor fantasy

Dear Shawna:

Welcome back to the world of editing fiction, and for coming back with a product like *Realms of Fantasy*. I enjoy reading both SF and F, but the markets that carry the F part of the equation have so far been few and far between.

I am one of those people who has a problem with horror. Too many magazines I've seen that claim they publish fantasy almost always mean horror—or dark fantasy that's so dark that it blurs into horror. The fact that you've talked about including a very broad spectrum from the fantasy field bodes well.

Considering that this magazine is being put out by the same wonderful people who bring us *Science Fiction Age*, I am expecting great things out of it. The fact that they selected you as editor is one of the better decisions, in my opinion. *SF Age* is a wonderful product, and *IASFM* under your guidance was a wonderful product as well. I believe you've hit on a winning combination here, and I am looking forward to losing myself in the pages of *Realms* as soon as it hits my mailbox.

Adrienne Gormley

Adrienne, thanks so much for taking the time to write those words of encouragement. I'm delighted (and exhausted) to be back working on short fiction, and I only hope the reality lives up to the fond memories people seem to have of my editing. As you can see before you, the first issue does indeed carry a "broad range of fantasy," and while I know you can't please all of the people all of the time, I hope that I've included, and will continue to include, enough variety to please (at least) most of the people most of the time. Brace yourself, though. There will be some horror mixed in as well.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I think this is going to be the fantasy magazine I've always been waiting for. I've tried other fantasy magazines before, but gave them up because the editors weren't going in the direction I wanted.

However, I have been a subscriber to *Asimov's* for years, and many of my favorite issues came out during your tenure there. I am very much looking forward to the first issue of *Realms of Fantasy*!

Sincerely,
Sarah L.W. Montouri

In many ways, ROF is the magazine I've been waiting for, too. For years I wondered why a fiction magazine couldn't be published in a full-size, glossy color format and sold on the racks at bookstores with every other magazine. I've always felt that what the fantasy genre has to offer should be appreciated by a larger read-

ing public, and I'm afraid that they are not going to be inclined to search the nooks and crannies of magazine racks looking for digest-sized magazines. I feel like we're all on the edge of a great adventure, and I'm glad to have you with me.

Dear Shawna,

Ever since the first storyteller sat before an audience and told of great deeds and great heroes, there have been fantastic stories that have enthralled and uplifted. It's exciting to know that this magazine will contribute to that body of literature.

We need fantasy. Not just to entertain. Not just for escape from the realities of life. Not just because any change is a rest. We need fantasy because fantasy can talk about things in subtle ways and in blatant ways that we can't use to talk about them in real life. Fantasy can talk about things that wouldn't and couldn't happen in real life, but that need to be considered and explored and discussed and experienced.

Fantasy is partly about people in places and situations they'd really never find themselves in. And because it is about people, it tells us how people would deal with such situations and how they would learn about and live in such places. Fantasy adds to our experience and understanding on top of its entertainment value. Through the different ways of looking at things in fantasy, we can broaden our appreciation for ourselves and those around us, we can share insights that may even change us a little—all while we're having fun.

Was it George Bernard Shaw who said something like "If you're going to tell people the truth, make them laugh when you do it, or they'll kill you."? Fantasy tells the truth while it entertains us.

So here's to the truth in all its fantastic forms. And here's to *Realms of Fantasy*, another great way to enjoy the truth. May there be many subscribers and many issues.

Sincerely,
Kathleen Dalton-Woodbury

Maybe that should be our subtitle: "Another great way to enjoy the truth." Or: "Realms of Fantasy—a delicious part of a healthy intellect." In all seriousness, though, thank you for an eloquent defense of that which would need no defending.

Your letters and comments are welcomed. Make sure you mark them as letters or they're likely to get mixed in with writer's guidelines requests. Please send them to: Letters to the Editor, *Realms of Fantasy*, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760.

REALMS OF FANTASY

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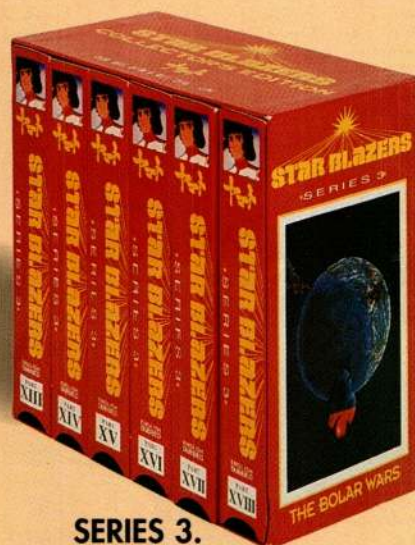
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The Hollowing, *Skin* and *The Year's Best* are fantasies to lead you dangerously astray.

ONE OF THE MOST MISLEADING IMAGES I REMEMBER BEING EXPOSED TO AS AN INNOCENT school child was a little drawing on the page of a science book which purported to show how we human beings saw things.

To the far right of the drawing was a tree standing in a field, and floating mysteriously over the middle of that field was a gigantic pink head with bulging blue eyes which gaped blankly at the tree. Because the artist had considerably scalped away half the head's skin and skull, its brain was clearly visible and one could see that the brain was, in fact, a

tiny movie theater with a ray entering from the head's eyes which projected a picture of the tree on a miniature screen that someone had been thoughtful enough to hang on the brain's rear wall. I have a vague notion that there was even a little man sitting midbrain in a chair watching the screen, but here my memory may be playing me tricks.

Of course I realized instantly, something was fundamentally amiss with the basic theory of the picture because the tree on the screen was upside down on account of the lenses in the eyes, and I knew for a fact that when I saw actual trees in actual fields, they were always right side up, but I had no idea that as time passed and science marched on we would discover that the science book had gotten it entirely wrong, that see-

ing was not at all the passive process shown in the floating pink head but a wild creative act, a continuous sorting out of bizarre clues given by our photon-bombarded neurons, the deductions being constantly skewed by our psychic hardware. If there are still any floating pink heads shown in schoolbooks nowadays, they surely must be a good deal busier.

I don't know if they were trying to fob off pink heads with their cute little movie theaters when Robert Holdstock's school days came around, but if they were, his Ryhope Wood novels, which I more than suspect you know began with the publication of *Mythago Wood*, clearly demonstrate that he has gotten over all that with a vengeance. In these books Holdstock not only dazzlingly illuminates and brings to life many of the more

arcane notions being toyed with by radically post-pink head psychology concerning our perceptions of the world outside and/or inside us, he routinely pushes beyond these speculations with genuinely frightening plausibility.

It's my firm conviction that really good, rock-solid fantasy is distinguished from merely entertaining fantasy by being dangerous. You gently glide over a story which is merely entertaining, observing the tigers in their jungles and the dragons on their craggy mountains from the safe elevation of a pretty cloud overhead, and when the story is finished, you waft away as thoroughly unaffected by it as one of F. Scott Fitzgerald's rich people is by the rigors and turmoils of life commonly experienced by the poor and the middle class.

A rock-solid fantasy, on the other hand, can lead you seriously astray. People wander off into it and are never seen again or, if glimpsed, they've become barely recognizable. Reading, for instance, Arthur Machen is a genuinely risky business because Arthur Machen knows secrets and he knows how to spring them on you so that you will never be able to forget them. Become lured too deeply into the maps and runic hints of Tolkien's Middle Earth and

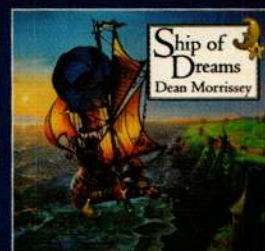
The Mythagos still haunts Holdstock's Wood. Cover art for The Hollowing by John Jude Palencar.



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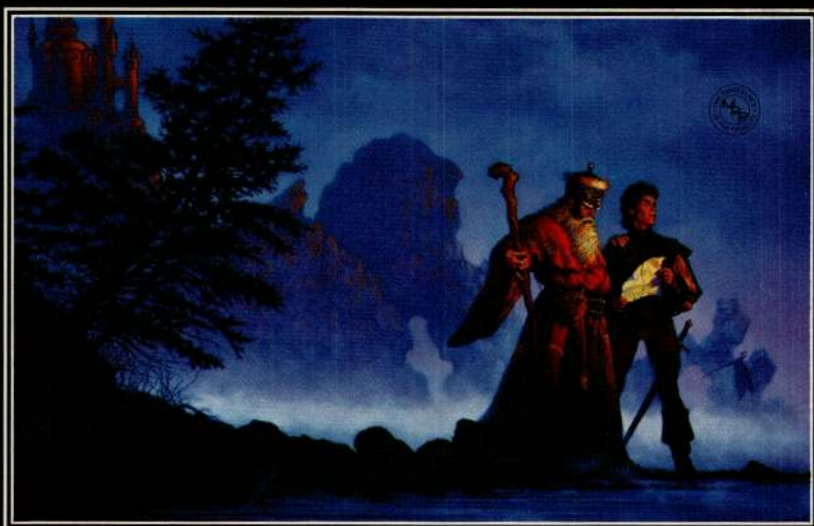
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your interest in day-to-day life may dim or die away altogether. Howard Phillips Lovecraft's sly, fictitious magic is so potent and convincing that it presently confuses very serious occultists so much that it may even end up making *them* more dangerous.

The Hollowing (Penguin Books USA, NY, 367 pp., Hardcover \$17.95) is Holdstock's new novel about Ryhope Wood, and it is, I think, right up there with the entrancingly plausible works of the superb authors cited above. The core concept of the Wood is one of the

best there is in fantasy: the idea of the *genius loci*, a nicely ambivalent sort of spookiness which migrates easily and confusingly back and forth from being the spirit of a place to being a spirit haunting a place. Holdstock has very skillfully tuned it to resonate with the unending problems we all have of confusing our perceptions of this world with the projections we insist on thrusting upon it, and—as if that weren't enough to pull us in and disorient us totally—he has lavishly enriched the brew with brilliant extrapolations on Jungian speculations.

But do not be misled into thinking that its weighty intellectual cargo makes *The Hollowing* in any way heavy. Far from it. It succeeds, as a matter of fact, as well as anything I've read at carrying on and developing the marvelous sort of swashbuckling science adventure novel which was developed and practiced so superbly by the master storyteller Arthur Conan Doyle, probably most successfully in his Professor Challenger epic *The Lost World*. I even noted in passing that Holdstock pays an amusing little tribute to this inspiration by having that very book referred to in a scrawled note hidden in a buried tube of bark marked with a cross by the most Challengerlike of his scientists: Alexander Lytton.

Lytton is the head of a steadily-shrinking band of brave researchers who have camped in Ryhope Wood in order to study its fabulous inhabitants and map its mysteriously

BOOKS TO LOOK FOR

The Seventh Gate, by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman (Bantam). The long awaited conclusion to the bestselling *Death Gate Cycle*. The publishers call it "a tale of romance, treachery, and heroism that will change the face of fantasy forever." Pick it up and judge for yourselves.

The Lays of Beleriad, by J.R.R. Tolkien (Del Rey). Edited by Christopher Tolkien, the tales of Middle Earth live on in this collection of lore from the land of the Hobbit.

Ship of Dreams, by Dean Morrissey (Mill Pond/Abrams). This lavishly and gorgeously illustrated tale for the very young should be a welcome relief for parents wearying of the *Poky Little Puppy* and hoping to inject some magic into the PowerRangers' generation.

The Innkeeper's Song, by Peter S. Beagle (Roc Books). This acknowledged master of fantasy, author of the classics *The Last Unicorn* and *A Fine and Private*

Place, writes far too infrequently, but when he does, the results are magical in every sense of the word.

The Dolphins of Pern, by Anne McCaffrey (Del Rey). Though nominally science fiction, Anne McCaffrey's Pern series has sold gazillions of copies to fantasy lovers worldwide. If you've never explored Pern, pick up the first and the last books and enjoy.

Love and Sleep, by John Crowley (Bantam). John Crowley is unquestionably one of the finest writers working in this or any other genre. If you're prepared to be enchanted, mesmerized and challenged, don't miss this, his sequel to the incredible *Aegypt*.

Tales of Mithgar, by Dennis McKiernan (Roc Books). One of the bestselling writers in today's fantasy market, McKiernan returns with a collection of rousing stories set in his mystical realm of Mithgar, told by his most popular characters.

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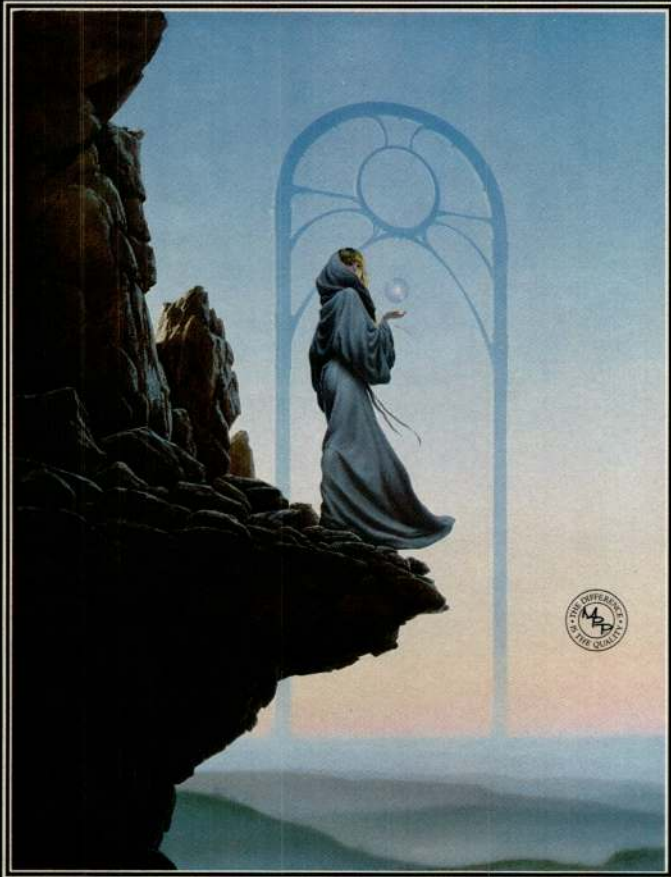
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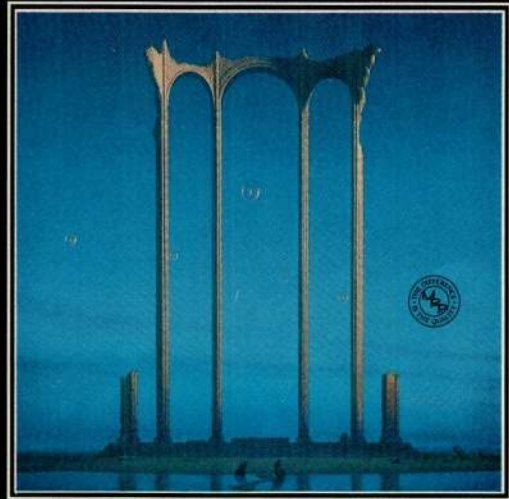
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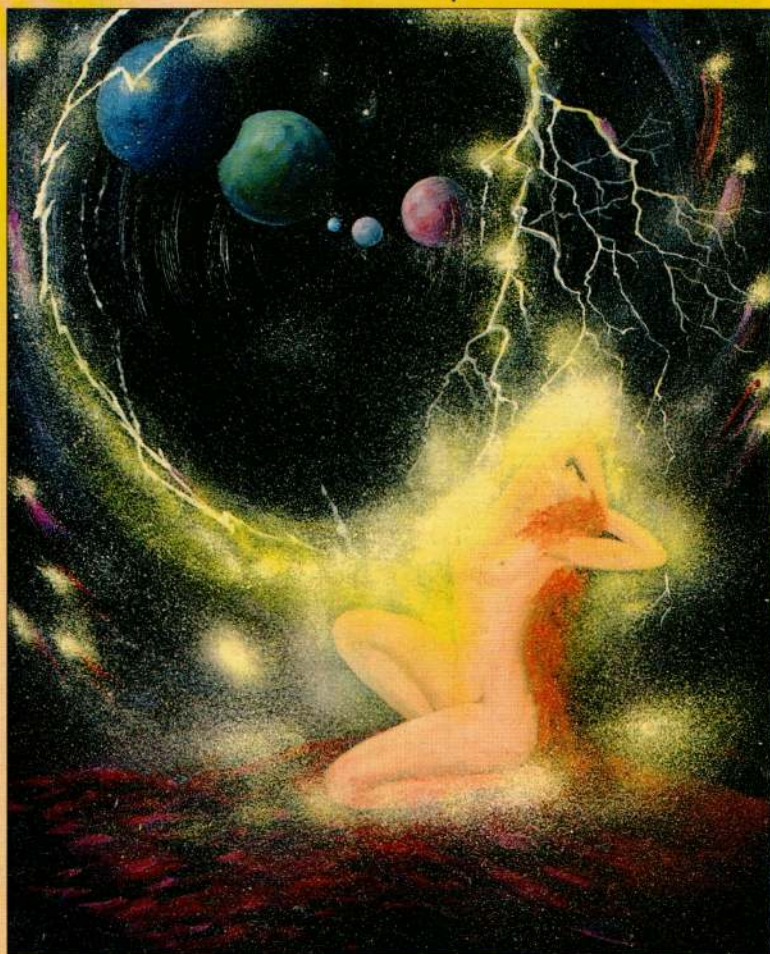
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endless ground.

The Wood is a singularly difficult area to map. Its dense exterior can be circumnavigated by a short walk, but if you manage to work your way through one of its magically-hidden entrances—say by following Sticklebrook—you'll find not only that it's astonishingly vast within but that it expands progressively as you grow more expert in navigating its psychic mazes.

There is a lovely scene in which Lytton unfurls and shows the map of Ryhope to an increasingly-awed visitor—Richard Bradley, who has joined the scientists in the course of a desperate search for his supposedly dead son, Alex—and then unrolls another map which reveals that Ryhope is merely the topwood, as they've come to call it, and that so far they've come across no less than five other underlayers, which are reached by means of tricky faults in space and time called hollowings.

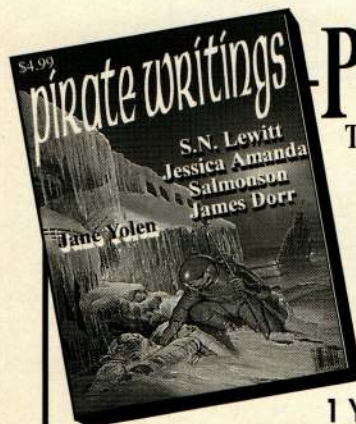
The mythagos, which are the inhabitants of this wondrous place, are more than sufficiently spectacular for their environment since they are, like many of that environment's architectural and natural features, the products of the unconscious minds of those who've come to explore Ryhope. Ryhope therefore swarms with, quite literally, anything one can imagine.

The charm of many of the major imaginings encountered in *The Hollowing* is that they are those of a child, the missing Alex, and the core of the plot is the marvelous way Holdstock handles the sometimes subtle and occasionally brutal things that happen when the adults must try to deal not only with these young dreamings given flesh and power, but with their own clumsy grownup reactions to them.

As if all this were not enough, Holdstock has packed his book with any number of entertaining side stories. One of my particular favorites concerns the encounter Bradley has with none other than an elderly Jason and his paunchy and graying, but nonetheless quite formidable, Argonauts, who are still savaging the world for wondrous spoil.

Holdstock has hilarious fun playing with the old legend and bringing changes to the fabulous creatures and treasures which are associated with it. Jason is shown to have his lovable little pack-rat quirks—it seems he continues to load the hull of the *Argo* with every golden fleece he comes across even though he can't find any takers for them—but Holdstock rather convincingly presents him as not being a very nice man at all. The Argonauts come across as a gang of pirates and bullies, continuing to pillage into their dotage more or less because the poor thugs can't think of anything else to do. I am confident that you will enjoy seeing them get their comeuppance as much as I did.

Although I am decidedly one of those who cringe and snarl and occasionally say rude things when someone tries to press on me something like book 18 of the bestselling



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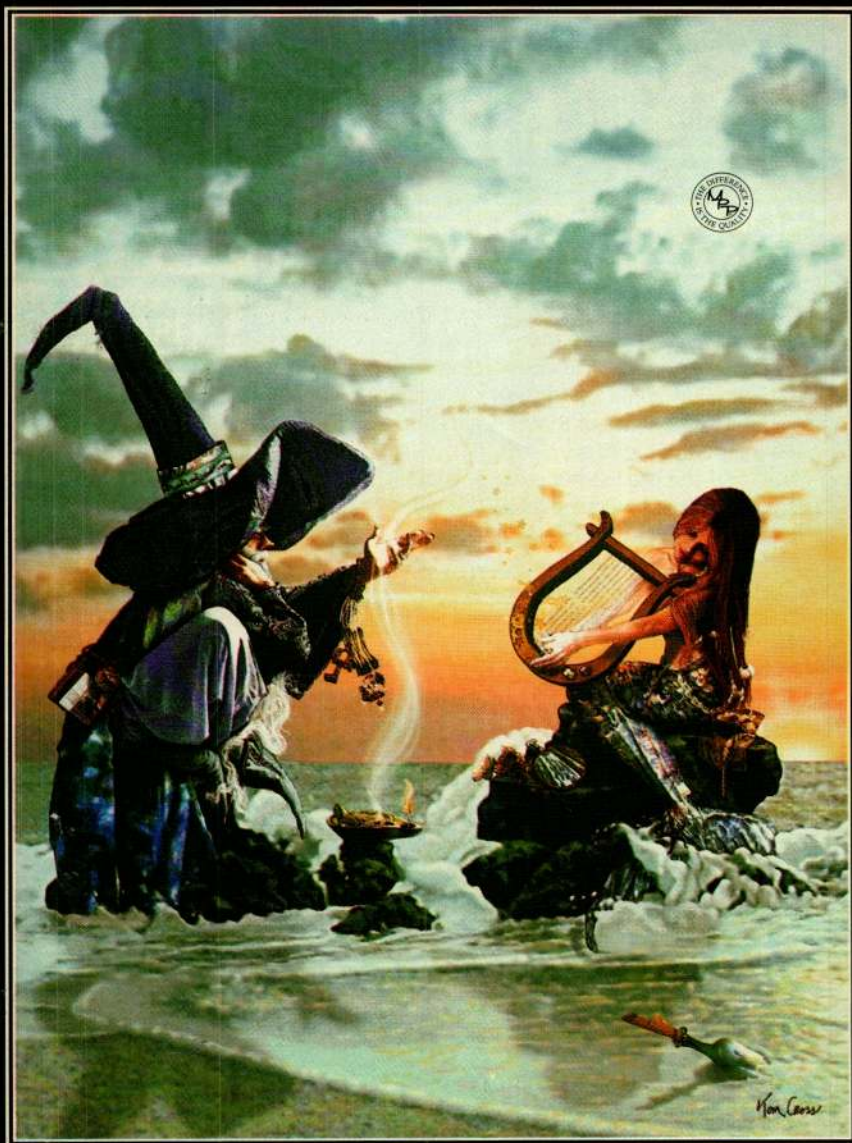
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BY TERRI WINDLING

The Green Guardian and the lore of the woods.

A STEEP, NARROW ROAD WINDS THROUGH THE OAKS OF AN ENGLISH WOOD TO OLD King's Nympton, a hillside village sitting above the Taw Valley. The name of the village comes from the Celtic word *nemeton*, meaning a sacred place or grove. At the village center is a Norman church and a cluster of old thatched cottages. Inside the church, on the wood rood screen and in the bosses of the ceiling, are numerous carvings of the Green Man, the Green Guardian of the Woods.

The Green Man is a mythic figure usually symbolized by a half-human face merging with leaves or a foliate mask, or disgorging vegetation from his mouth. The Green Men in the King's Nympton church date to the 15th century, but similar faces had been carved in wood and stone in churches across Europe for centuries before. It is a pre-Christian symbol that was adopted by the church; no one knows precisely why, or just what the Green Man represented to pagan communities before. But such is his power that he has survived as a potent archetype to this day, the symbol of the mythic wood, of our relationship with the natural world, and of the wild inside ourselves.

Surrounding King's Nympton in Devon, England

Following a footpath in the enchanted forests of Devon, England, we're drawn into the wondrous lands and mythology of the woodland. Art by Alan Lee.



are many places bearing Nympton, Nymph and Nymet in their names. Archaeological evidence—including the remains of a large “woodhenge” or tree temple—indicate that the area was an ancient stronghold of Celtic tree worship; as well as the birthplace of St. Boniface, the eighth-century saint who cut down the sacred groves and sought to bind the powers of nature under the dominion of the church. As a result the countryside bears an unusually large number of Green Man carvings in its rural churches and buildings. (More rare are depictions of the Green Man's female counterpart: the Sheela-Na-Gig, an earthy figure who gives birth to a spray of vegetation between her legs.) The Green Man is often linked to the mysterious Green Knight of Arthurian romances; to the folklore figure of the Jack of the Green; the sacrificial seasonal king; and the Wodehouse: the Wild Man. Intrigued by the profusion of Green Men to be found in King's Nympton and the area around my home in Devon, I decided to follow their trail into the woods: not only to seek out the enchanted forests of myth, but to see how those myths still resonate in the world we live in today.

The mythology of the woodland captured a vivid part of the imagination of ancient peoples in Europe and North America, for the forest stretched across these lands, making up a large part of their world. It provided them with vital food and fuel yet at the same time harbored their deepest fears: robbers, madmen, beasts of the wild and creatures of the supernatural. As late as the sixth century in Britain, the area north of Hadrian's Wall (that is to say the entire country of Scotland) was referred to by southern scribes as one great forest, populated only by the ghosts of the dead, which civilized people were cautioned to avoid. Centuries of agriculture and land management have tamed the countryside since then, and lessened our cultural fears of the woods. Yet a walk through one of the remaining old forests reminds us of the forested world of ages past: a place where mystery lived in the shadows; where oak and beech made cathedrals as lofty as their echo in Gothic stone.

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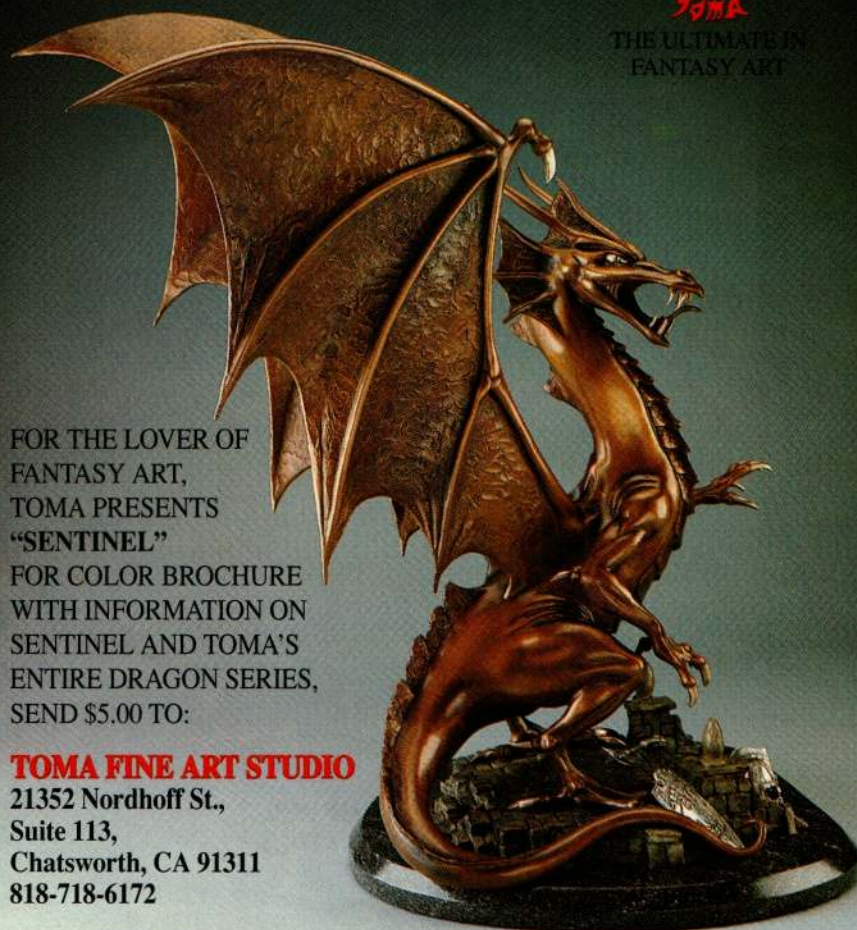
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of Mesopotamia, c. 4,000-3500 B.C., and can be found among the imagery of virtually every culture around the globe. An oak tree was a central part of the oracle of Zeus at Dodona; the rustling of its leaves when nary a wind blew was one way the messages of the oracle were conveyed. The Celts created a Tree Alphabet, and individual trees contained magical properties: the oak was the most scared of all, but ash, hazel, willow and thorn received their share of veneration. The rowan tree was a faery tree, and protection against the Devil. In west Africa, the Ibo tribe believed that the Iroko tree possessed a man's heart; to fell the tree was to kill the man and loose his soul upon the wind.

The Scandinavians conceived the universe as a giant ash tree called Yggdrasil; it linked the nine worlds of their mythology, its roots reaching down to the lands of the Gods, the Giants, and the dead. Odin hung from the tree for nine days and drank from the waters of Mimir at its roots, gaining the wisdom he sought but leaving one eye behind as payment. In America, the Lakota (Sioux) "Sundance" ceremony is still performed around a sacred tree; the dancers are literally attached to the tree by ropes and wooden pins pierced through their flesh. In mythic terms, the ceremony echoes Odin's trials upon the World Tree and Christ's hours upon the wooden poles of the Cross.

From the Maori comes the following creation myth, evoking the first great forest of the world: In the beginning was Nothing, and from Nothing came the Night. The Rangî gods, children of Nothing and Night, crawled into this dark world through the narrow space between their bodies. Eventually Tane-mahuta, the father of the forest, rose to his feet seeking freedom and light and managed to push his parents apart. But he loved his parents and wished to clothe them in such beauty as had never been seen before. So he set his children, the trees, in the earth. He planted them upside-down at first, their white roots waving in the air, but soon he got it right.

To ancient peoples, the woodland was the home of creatures who, like the Green Men, were part human and part vegetation. The Yakshi were Hindu tree-goddesses who lived in and guarded individual trees, like the dryads of Greek and Roman myth. Apollo, the Greek god of vegetation, was born from the trunk of a myrrh tree, and later pursued the mountain nymph Daphne, who was changed into a laurel tree in order to escape him. Pan was a figure who embodied the spirit of the woods: earthy, sexual, compelling and dangerous. In the guise of Puck he was a Trickster spirit, a rude joker and Divine Fool whose counterpart was Loki and Hermes in Europe, Raven and Coyote in North America.

In the woods, nothing was as it appeared,

but imbued with the dark magic of shape-shifting and transformation. Diana, the Greek goddess of the wood and the hunt, could transform herself into a fleet-footed stag. Herne the Hunter roamed the forests of the Celts as a man, as a stag, and as a creature with the features of both. In Cherokee legends, white deer were fairy maidens who lured young men deep into the woods; these men would then lose their lives, or go mad, or else return to the tribe as great poets. This echoes a theme of Celtic faery lore, the notion that a chance encounter in the woods could leave one dead, blind, preternaturally aged, mad...or inspired as an artist. In the Scottish ballad "Thomas the Rhymer," it is the Fairy Queen whom Thomas meets in the woods; she gives him the gift of poetry but only after seven years of his service. In "Tam Lin," a young woman meets and makes love to a mysterious young man in the woods of Carterhaugh. It transpires that he is not a fairy himself, but a mortal captive of the fairy court. When she finds herself pregnant after their woodland tryst, she braves the wrath of the Fairy Queen to win him back to mortal lands.

The forest was an important part of the fairy tales of our childhood: the place where wolves hid, where children went astray, where queens made bargains that sealed their fates and king's sons lost their hearts. Scholars, such as Maria von Franz and

Joseph Campbell, who have studied the archetypal motifs in fairy tales point out that the journey Into the Wood is a necessary part of our life journey: the wood represents our unconscious mind; the journey represents the journey within, and the solitude in which we find healing and wisdom.

Despite the industrialization of our world, we still have that primal cultural need to go Into the Wood; to seek solitude, renewal and mystery in its shadows. In the countryside around my village, the woods are filled with well-worn footpaths. They wind along rivers, past farmer's fields, over stone walls and stiles and into the forest. As I walk through the silver early-morning light on a path through the gorge below the local castle, I am reminded of the journeys in fantasy books; and in particular of all those long travelers' paths that wind at a such a satisfyingly slow foot pace through the landscape of Tolkien's Middle Earth.

Editor Patrick Nielsen Hayden once observed that the years when J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* became a best-seller in America were the very same years that the ecology movement began to pick up steam there. (Here in Britain 20 years later, the youthful members of the local Green movement, working to protect these woods from the threat of developers, cars and motorways, usually have well-read copies of Tolkien's books upon their shelves; and the Green Man has become the

symbol of the British ecology movement.) One of the great appeals of Tolkien's books, for author and reader alike, is the chance to slowly wander a land that is verdant, green, unspoiled, and vast. Tolkien was a great lover of the English woodlands (that love imbues every page of his text). So is his most successful illustrator, Alan Lee, whose paintings are filled with footpaths that capture the eye and draw one into his wondrous lands.

Alan is a neighbor of mine, and so later that day, in the dusky twilight, we walk beside the River Teign and talk about the mythic wood. Alan's paintings, drawings and etchings are filled with the woods, with ivy-draped trees, with lichen on bark, with the twisty limbs of Devon oak, beech and rowan. We walk beneath huge grandfather trees, like the sentient trees in Rackham illustrations. The river runs gold as evening falls. The trees rustle in the wind in the soft language of fillomancy: an ancient form of divination.

"To be 'wood' in medieval terms," Alan has written (for an exhibition of his Arthurian paintings), "meant to be afflicted by a particular form of madness in which the body sprouted a covering of thick hair or feathers and the individual lived as an animal in the forest, eating nuts and berries and shunning all human contact. Many of the heroes of the Romances entered this state at some point, most often prompted by

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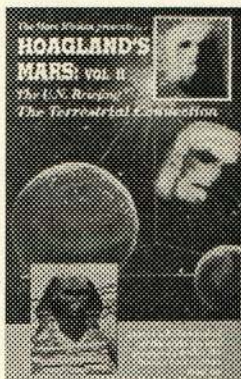
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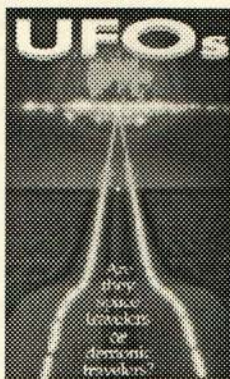
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a crisis in their love lives. It is likely, however, that these stories are memories of ancient shamanistic rituals in which the physical body suffered deprivation while a spiritual journey in the company of totem animals was undertaken."

In tribal traditions that range as widely as Britain, Siberia and North America, the initiation of a shaman was often preceded by a period of time in which a man or woman went into the forest alone, fasting for a ritual number of days, or living like the creatures of the wild for weeks, months, even years. Merlin, in one version of the old Welsh annals, goes mad after the Battle of Arderydd and roams the wilderness of the Forest of Calidon, living like a beast with the deer and wolves, eating only roots and berries. There he learns the speech of animals; and his fits of madness are also construed in the annals as prophetic trances. A parallel story is the Irish tale of Suibhne, who is cursed in battle and flees into the wilderness, exiled in the shape of a bird. Like Merlin (who also has many bird legends associated with him), his season in the wood is a time of anguish and madness, but also one in which he gains extraordinary knowledge of, and dominion over, the creatures of the forest.

These phantastical stories contain the seeds of the actual practices of shamanic and prophetic figures in ancient cultures. Likewise, the Wild Man in medieval art and Romance was not just a mythical archetype but also a representation of actual historical figures: the men and women who lived alone in the forest, past the boundaries of civilization. Hermits, simpletons, witches, prophets—they were a common part of medieval life; and they still inhabited the woodlands of Britain within living memory.

For those of us who dream of old forests and are stirred by the mythic lore of the woods, there are many modern writers of fiction working with these mythic archetypes: the Wild Man and Wild Woman, the Shaman, the Jack of the Green. Robert Holdstock's fiction does this most thoroughly, taking us further, deeper into the Wood than any other contemporary writer. (See Gahan Wilson's review of Holdstock's most recent novel *The Hollowing* in this issue.) Kingsley Amis' novel *The Green Man* (also adapted for television) works intriguingly with the ancient archetype, fashioning it into a mysterious tale set in modern East Anglia. Angela Carter and Tanith Lee are both writers skilled at evoking the untamed woods of fairy tales. Carter turned her dark, sensual story "A Company of Wolves" (from the collection *The Bloody Chamber*) into the screenplay for the movie of the same name, evoking a forest that stretches from Once Upon a Time into our most troubled dreams. Tanith Lee's story collections *Red as Blood* and *Forest of the Night* contain thoroughly adult fairy

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tales; Lee's woodlands tend to be cold, full of wolves and red blood dripping bright on crisp white snow.

In North America, Patricia McKillip's sensual and under-rated novel *Stepping from the Shadows* uses the woodland figure of the Stagman to create a quiet yet powerful contemporary story about a young woman's sexual and artistic maturation. McKillip's other novels, set in far-off imaginary lands, also lead us into and out of mythic woods that are vividly rendered and real to the touch, steeped in rich mythopoetic language. Similar to McKillip in the elegant simplicity of her craft, Alice Hoffman works with the Wild Man archetype in her beautiful new book *Second Nature*, a contemporary, earth-rooted, passionate story that speaks to the wild inside us all.

Charles de Lint is a writer who is at his best bringing ancient myths into the streets of urban Canada. In novels like *Spiritwalk*, *Yarrow*, and *Memory and Dream* he summons the creatures of the mythic wood (reminiscent of Pan, Artemis, Herne the Hunter) to explore our great desire for mystery and magic in modern life. John Crowley takes us on a woodland journey in his splendid novel *Little, Big*, an adult fairy tale that is both contemporary and Victorian, both urban and rural; while in *Engine Summer*, a science fiction novel written in the poetic language of fantasy,



Merlin enters a prophetic trance in his time of madness when he lived like a beast in the wilderness. Art by Alan Lee.

Crowley takes us into a future woodland where saints live up in the trees. Richard Grant's *Rumors of Spring* is another futuristic novel with more than a touch of the mythic at its heart. In the future world that Grant has created, our Earth is one great forest—a forest that continues to grow, and grow, and grow, without sign of stopping.

In Grant's novel, his protagonists set off

on a quest to stop the overwhelming advance of the woodlands. In our own society we have the opposite task, to preserve what little wildwood remains and to understand its place in our lives. To this end, organizations like Britain's Common Ground are bringing scientists and artists together to forge a greater understanding and awareness of the woodlands. These organizations not only sponsor exhibitions and publications to bring art with woodland themes into urban galleries, they are also bringing art into the woods themselves, commissioning outdoor sculpture for woodland footpaths all across England.

Peter Randall Page's Common Ground sculpture by the River Teign is one I pass by often. It is a subtle piece, carved in stone, so unobtrusive one can easily walk right past it: a boulder sits cracked open like an egg, and inside is a leaflike pattern beautifully carved into the exposed surface of the stone, like crystals exposed in a geode, or runic symbols from another world. Farther north, David Kemp's "Ancient Forester" stands sentinel among the trees at Grizedale. He is a huge, vaguely human, archaic figure made of wood, antlers bristling from his head, reminiscent of Herne the Hunter and the stagmen of Celtic legend.

Thomas Joshua Cooper's work with the mythic land takes the form of black-and-white photographs (of Britain, Iceland,

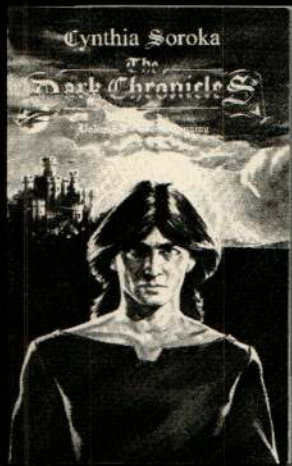
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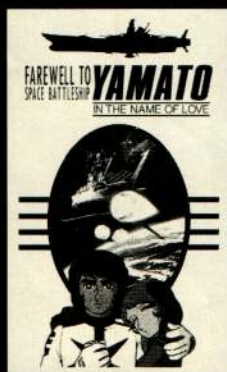
The amazing history of Yamato movies and TV programs is almost as fantastic as the animated adventures themselves. Although "Farewell To Space Battleship Yamato" is not the first or last, it's a great favorite for fans of the chronicles.

This feature film, never released in the United States until now, was produced in response to the extraordinary success of the first Yamato movie, "Space Battleship Yamato."

That one has been seen in the U.S., as a television series called "Star Blazers." The second season of the TV series was an alternate storyline version of the second movie. Now, for the first time, you can see the original story, produced for English speaking audiences.

Yamato animation has been critically acclaimed for special effects, direction, set design, and it's fine-art quality. Spectacular action sequences are balanced by thoughtful interaction among the heroes and villains in this epic saga of intergalactic love and war.

In "Farewell To Space Battleship Yamato," love unites the ship and its crew and their common destiny. So say hello to "Farewell To Space Battleship Yamato." And say farewell to space-opera as you know it.



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North America and other landscapes, collected in *Between Dark and Dark* and *Dreaming the Gokstadt*). These stark, haunting images of wood and stone bear titles such as "Ceremonial Dwelling" and "A Quality of Dancing," and are imbued with subtle, simple magic. One cannot help but wonder if this is how Merlin saw the world as he wandered with the stags and wolves; if this is what the shaman sees when he fasts or drums or prays his way into a mantric trance. Photographer Rachel Giese has gone into the wilderness herself to follow the journey of Suibhne's exile, capturing the rough and timeless beauty of the Irish hills with her lens.

In "the Mythic Garden" at Stone Farm, Devon, dozens of artists and artisans come together each year to display myth-inspired works in a five-acre arboretum. One image still stands out in my mind from last summer's exhibition: a Green Man's face etched into wood by Welsh artist Alec Lewis. The eyes peered out from a mask of leaves; behind his head were the intricate patterns of traditional Celtic knotwork. The sculpture stood in a quiet grove of trees at the far end of the Mythic Garden. A small path was beaten in the grass that led into the grove; and before the sculpture was a small pile of objects: feather, pinecones, water-polished stones, a few tarnished coins, a red ribbon. They were spontaneous gifts from the exhibition viewers, offerings left by modern men and women—not pagans, but ordinary people—before this ancient, mysterious image. We may never know precisely what those wood carvers were thinking in the distant past when they created the first crude Green Man faces. But we do know that centuries later he has a power that touches us still.

Oliver Rackham has pointed out (in the catalogue for the Tree of Life exhibition) that wildwood once covered the land of Britain, as well as North America; and that the native trees of the wildwood are forever trying to return. He notes that if farming were to cease in England, the country would be one vast wood within a century. The mythology of the woodland is like those persistent trees. Artistic fashions come and go: in some decades myth and folklore are considered acceptable tools for the serious artist, in other decades only strict realism will do. But the myths of the wood creep back into our consciousness, back into our books, our art and dreams, whenever they are given half a chance, whenever we—as creators, critics, and audience—don't aggressively, determinedly uproot them. There's a power in these ancient myths we can still feel in our bones today. The artists who tap that power at its source, going Into the Wood for creative inspiration, are fashioning works both contemporary and timeless, speaking in a symbolic language directly to our deepest dreams. 

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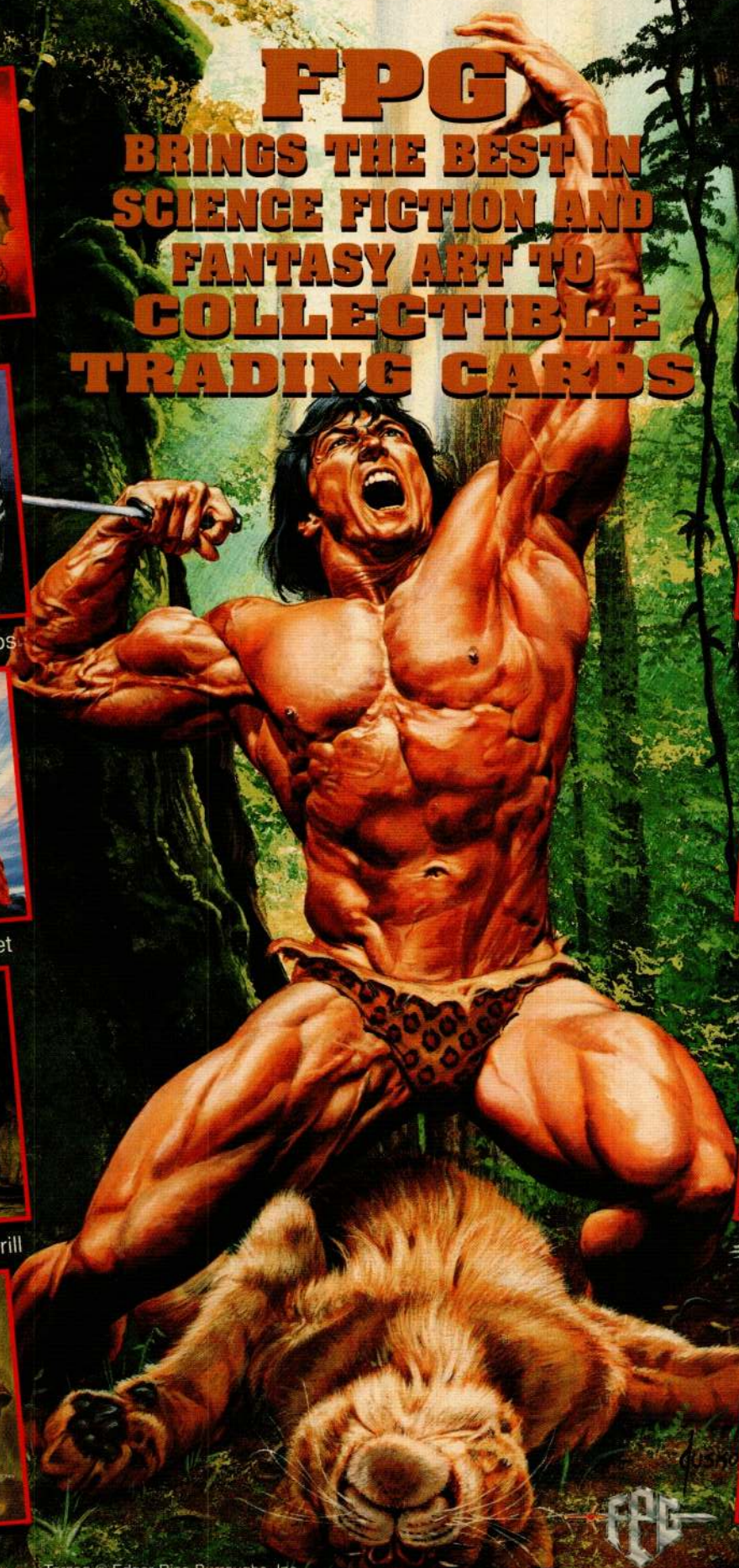
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Keeping her promise to return to avenge her mother's death and take her place as heir, this able warrior encounters a homecoming that is more than bitter.

Twist Dusk and Dawn

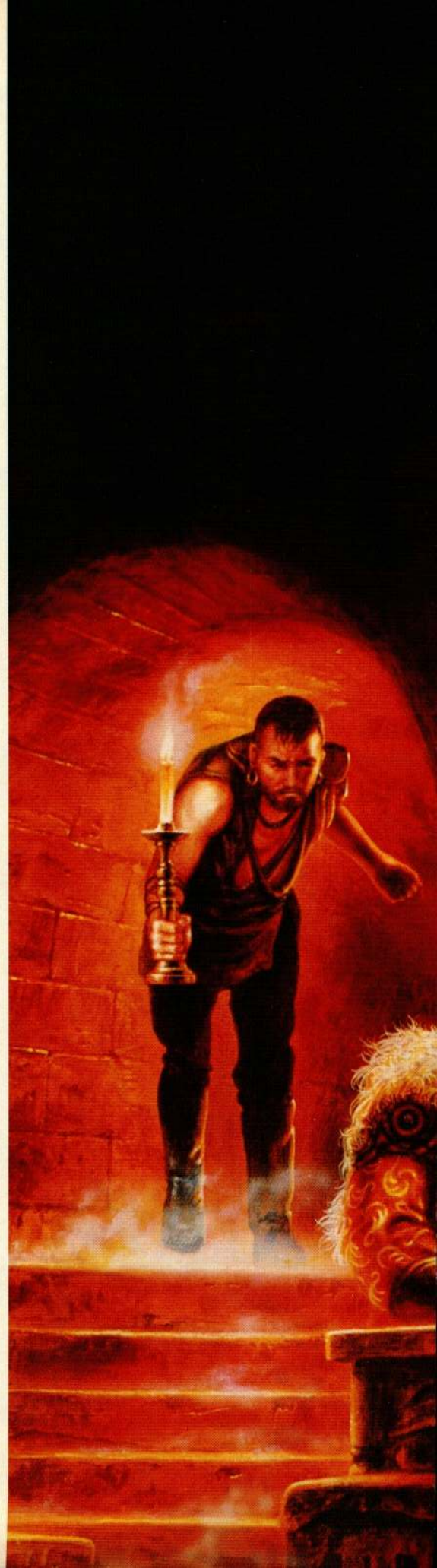
THE INN AT FOUR CORNERS WAS MODERATELY busy, the noontide patrons eating and drinking and conversing noisily. At the back of the large common room, a minstrel plied his trade on a lute, and Corlain found her gaze returning again and again to the red-haired youth whose song rang gently behind the voices of the crowd.

"Cori," Thorn rasped at her as he tipped the jug and poured more ale into her tankard. "Damn! Will you listen to me?"

She turned to him, her face set, and Thorn drew a deep breath to begin anew the argument they'd carried on throughout the day.

"Of what worth is this foolhardy venture?" he demanded. "Forget Gamehest and come south with me. Shira says there's a fine squabble starting up between two small kingdoms along the Pale. Let's find ourselves some wealthy lordling to follow. There'll be gold enough for two such as we."

BY L. DEAN JAMES
Illustration by Luis Royo





She shook her head and brought the tankard to her lips, taking a long pull of the cool frothy drink. When she replaced it on the table, Thorn's hand closed lightly over hers.

"If you could wrest your family lands from old Scrim—what then? You're near past the age to get an heir. And what do you know of farming? Will you plow the fields with your sword?"

"Perhaps." She drew her spare angular hand from his grip.

"Ah, Cor. We've fought too long together. There's no warrior, man or woman, I'd rather have beside me in the thick of it than you." He took a quick swallow from his mug, avoiding her gray eyes. "I'd go with you to Gamehest, I would...but I've no wish for death. I'd as soon face an army alone as go up against Scrim. He has an evil reputation, that one, and I've no liking for magicians, anyhow."

"He murdered my mother," said Corlain, voice cold.

"And how will your death serve her now?"

Corlain refused to answer; instead she let her attention drift once more to the minstrel. Frowning, Thorn followed her gaze.

"Ahhh," he said softly. "Could it be, after all these years, we've found something that strikes your fancy?" The old soldier replenished his own tankard as he spoke. "His name is Oren. I'm told he's got suitors aplenty—both male and female." He paused, amused. "Of course, I prefer a fine wench, myself, though boys are better than naught. He is a comely lad."

Corlain eyed her comrade sourly, and Thorn shrugged his thick shoulders. "A soldier takes his pleasure as he can. The rest of us are not so coldhearted as you, Cor, that we don't appreciate, betimes, some warm and willing body to share our lonely beds." He watched the minstrel thoughtfully now. "The innkeeper says the lad's got his price, though he's a bit choosy. And a bit fey...but these red-haired Northerners mostly are. What say? Shall I ask the boy? We could share him tonight." He shot her a coarse grin.

"His looks are as fair as his voice," Corlain agreed, "but I'll be far from here by darkfall."

The grin faded slowly from Thorn's grizzled face, and laughing gently, Corlain pushed back her chair and rose. She tossed a heavy silver coin, and it fell ringing beside Thorn's mug.

"There's for the ale, my friend, and for your pleasure of the night. Be kind to the boy. Farewell, Thorn."

She turned her back on her old comrade's murmured goodbye and pushed her way through the crowd to the door, then paused a last time to look at the minstrel. His eyes, bright and blue, were on her as well, and though the song continued, he smiled around his words and inclined his head slightly in her direction.

OUTSIDE, NARI STOOD PATIENTLY IN THE SHADE OF AN alder next to the inn. The black mare dozed hipshot, her tail swishing idly at afternoon flies. The saddle and pack had not been molested, but then Nari, big and ugly-tempered, would never have allowed it. Corlain tightened the girth and mounted, turning the horse onto the road north.

The woods of Darking closed in about her not long after leaving Four Corners. Though the day was hot, here among the trees the air proved cool. Slowly, she became aware of the scents of dusty summer, aware of the almost weightless feel of her own body. She wore only a sleeveless leather jerkin and breeches, her breasts unbound. She'd forsaken the warrior's protective gear; the ring mail

"We've fought too long together. There's no warrior, man or woman, I'd rather have beside me in the thick of it than you." He took a quick swallow from his mug, avoiding her gray eyes. "I'd go with you to Gamehest, I would...but I've no wish for death. I'd as soon face an army alone as go up against Scrim. He has an evil reputation, and I've no liking for magicians, anyhow."

hood, the cuirass and helm, and instead of feeling vulnerable, she felt somehow free. Corlain carried only her weapons now, her dirk and the crossbow she hunted with—and the sword, which death alone would part from her.

The leagues passed easily under Nari's shambling, long-legged walk. The forest grew dense with oak and fir, and the sky above the road became a ribbon of deep summer blue. No one had passed this way in a very long while; the dust beneath them held no sign of man or horse, only the track of deer, of fox and rabbit. Few people traveled north by way of Darking Wood. The forest was believed enchanted. Once, Corlain knew, it had been the final refuge of the Old Ones, a venerable and mystical folk now long vanished from the world. But tales of their power remained to haunt the living. And there was Scrim's power, close at hand, to contend with.

Of the wood itself, Corlain had no fear, only respect. Darking bordered Gamehest on the south, and she'd hunted here as a child, willful and gifted with weapons, even then. Now she returned home, but not as she had once thought—not with a husband to receive her mother's blessing or to manage the fertile lands in her turn. No, Thorn was right. Against the wizard, Scrim, she had little

chance, but Gamehest was as good a place as any to die and better than most, and lately she'd grown weary of life.

SHE CHASTISED HERSELF FOR SUCH SENSELESS WONDERING and turned her attention to the road ahead. Dusk had arrived almost unnoticed, but it was the long gloaming of summer. While the light still held, she chose a campsite—a small open area along the way that offered a creek and grazing for Nari. It was then she heard the drum of hooves resounding softly from the tree boles. A horse, hard-ridden, approached from the south. Out of habit, she loosened the sword in its scabbard, then twisted in the saddle to unlatch the crossbow from the cante. She cocked the weapon quickly and set a quarrel in place before putting Nari into the trees where they could wait in concealment. It occurred to her that perhaps Thorn had changed his mind but passed that off as unlikely.

It was not Thorn, but a lone man on a lathered horse, riding low on the animal's back, his eyes on the dust of the road. Just beyond where Corlain waited in the trees, he pulled the horse to a plunging halt and spun it around. Only now Corlain stood with Nari in the road, blocking his way back.

The minstrel from the inn looked more curious than dismayed at the armed woman before him. He was dressed all in red from the scarlet cap on his carrotty hair to his bright crimson silk shirt and his dyed leather breeches. This was some vanity of his, no doubt, for even his horse was sorrel in color, and as sleek and fine-boned as Nari was not. The young man carried his lute strapped across his back, and on his horse were bedroll and bags. He doffed his cap in a sweeping half-bow.

"My lady," he said.

Corlain stiffened, searching his face for some hint of disrespect. There seemed none, but still she was offended. In all her years, she had never been addressed as "my lady." She was a warrior, lean and scarred, her face and bare muscular arms deeply tanned by the sun, her pale hair cropped carelessly short.

"You have strayed overfar from the tavern," she said coldly, the

crossbow aimed at the young man's midriff.

"Not far enough, as yet," he answered. "I've left their employ."

"So suddenly? With work hard to find? Yours appeared lucrative enough."

"Lucrative?" he repeated wryly. "At dinner I played my best for you and no coin from your purse found its way to my cap."

"Perhaps I had no coin to spare."

"Ah," he said. "Just so! And so say all the patrons these days. But I have more imperative reasons to hasten away from the inn at Four Corners." His periwinkle eyes sparkled mischievously.

"Oh, ho," said Corlain, smiling despite herself. "Found your way into one too many bedchambers, did you?"

Unoffended, the youth waved a casual, graceful hand. "Some such thing."

"So why take the road north?"

"I have relatives in Norshire." His mare shuffled forward as he spoke until she was nose to nose with Nari, snuffling. Nari squealed angrily and struck out with a foreleg. Corlain jerked her back.

"Your name is Oren?" She lowered the bow slightly.

"Aye," the boy answered cheerfully. "And you are the Lady Corlain Oscuel, who rides to Norshire to win back Gamehest, the ancient familial seat of the Oscuels."

The weapon came to bear again. "How do you know these things?" Corlain demanded.

Undaunted, Oren said lightly, "I could tell you I'm fey—that I have the sight. Or I could say your friend, Thorn, told me as much at the tavern." He was laughing now. "Also, your sword bears the Oscuel crest carved into its hilt, and it is known to me. My family has long been in Norshire—though we are not so highborn as you." He nodded toward Corlain's sword. "It was your mother's, was it not?"

Corlain's jaw tightened. "Thorn speaks too freely to strangers."

"Please, my lady. Think no ill of Thorn. He only worries aloud."

"If he worries so, where is he when I need him?"

"You mustn't think him a coward, either—he's only wise. The wizard who holds Gamehest is a powerful man. A mere soldier has little chance against him. But then perhaps I may help you in good Thorn's stead."

"How?" asked Corlain with sour amusement. "Do you carry weapons?"

"Never," the youth answered with a downward pull of his full, sensuous lips. "I have no skill with them. I have only the knife I eat and shave with, and even it misuses me whenever it has the chance."

His answer was so forthright and his expression so rueful that Corlain was moved to laughter, gently derisive. "Well, lad, I think you'd be more hindrance than help, though I thank you for the offer—"

"At least," Oren cut in, "let me come with you part of the way."

WHEN CORLAIN FROWNED, HE LOCKED EYES with her and said brazenly, "There are some who find me good company...."

"Ye gods!" she snorted.

A tiny stir of movement on the periphery of her vision diverted her attention, and she turned in the saddle, a quick fluid motion, loosing the bolt from the crossbow. It flew hissing into the dusky woods, and with an almost human squall of anguish, a rabbit flung itself high in the air. It dropped like a stone and lay still.

Oren whistled softly. "I think you would make a formidable adversary, my lady."

Corlain kicked her feet free of the stirrups and dropped to the ground.

"The day's gone," she said gruffly. "You may share my camp this night." Oren grinned, and she hardened her face. "But know this—I will ride from here at dawn, and I will ride alone. I don't care for company. Now. If you wish to share my supper, you'll do your share of the work."

"Whatever you ask, my lady."

"You may gut and skin the rabbit."

Oren paled, visibly stricken.

With a shake of her head, Corlain relented. "Then build the fire. But make it a small one. If there are spirits about, as some believe, we'll do as little to disturb them as possible."

"No harm will come to us in Darking," Oren said with quiet surety as he dismounted.

"Your fey sight, again?" Corlain retrieved the coney, drew out the bolt and wiped the blood on the grass.

"I may carry no weapons, my lady," the boy answered, a faint, mysterious smile on his lips, "but I'm not without power." He turned away to gather windfall branches, the sweated sorrel trailing at his heels.

THEY SAT BESIDE THE FIRE AND ATE, THE DARKNESS HUGGING their backs. Oren had not come empty-handed, producing wine and bread from his saddlebags. He was animated, full of youthful energy, his hands gesturing wildly while he spoke.

"Magic is all around us," the boy expounded, then tilted the wineskin and poured a dark red stream into his mouth before passing it to Corlain. "We are all gifted with magic in one form or another."

"Not I," said Corlain.

"Untrue. The Old Ones—they believed in the power of the attention. They believed that those items we concentrate on become imbued with our power, our magic. For me, it is my lute—for you, your sword."

"Nonsense."

Oren gave her a dry look. "Does your sword have a name?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Those who hear the name do not live to speak it."

"Just so!" Oren pounced on the fact. "Why? Because you fear if another called it, it could be turned against you. Don't tell me you haven't felt the weapon's life on a field of battle—that it hasn't leapt in your grasp, eager for blood."

Corlain stayed silent, but felt Oren's eyes on her, bright and searching. She looked up.

"We could be lovers," the youth said suddenly, his face flushed in the firelight.

Corlain stiffened. "No."

"Why not? Are you bound by some warrior's oath?"

"No."

"You have a husband, then?"

She glared at him, on the verge of anger, but answered, voice tight. "Once I had a husband, long ago. We fought together...we thought to die together, but it was not to be."

"And you've taken no lovers since?"

"None," she said harshly.

His brow furrowed. "So great an offering on the altar of death," he muttered, blue eyes filled with pity.

Corlain uncurled, rising in one sinuous motion, her hand hard on the hilt of her sword. But Oren was lost in the flames now, his eyes unfocused, oblivious to her ire. She turned and stalked to her blankets, setting her weapons beside the makeshift bed, then lay on it, her back to the fire.

She was a soldier. She'd trained herself over the years not to think or ponder, not to reflect—one stayed alive by reflex, not reflection. Her life had become a series of responses, reactions to situations, nothing more. The past did not exist except as a guide by which one charted the next moment. But here was Oren, young, alive, febrile—cheerfully dredging up memories Corlain had long since buried. She could almost hate him. Almost.

The lute sounded, one long mournful note that faded, then was followed by another and another, building in quick succession to a melody. Oren's sweet voice joined it liltingly. She tried to block out

the words, but they slipped through her guard.

"These gifts I offer twixt dusk and dawn,
My soul betrayed within my song.
You are the lute I'm bid to play,
Your senses, the strings I set to sway.
Come, my lady, eschew the day."

He'd spoken of power, and it was there within his music, an eldritch magic. His voice became an almost physical thing, caressing her. Corlain stirred restlessly and drew her knees up, covering her ears with her arms. Abruptly the music ceased, and the silence seemed far worse. She turned on the bed.

He stood over her, his body silhouetted by the fire.

"No," Corlain said hoarsely.

Oren went to his knees, and she could see his face now, his eyes wide and dark. Slowly he unlaced the red silk shirt. Corlain raised a fist, but he caught her arm deftly, pressing her back against the blankets.

"Don't," she snarled.

"I must," he whispered and covered her mouth with his.

Sweet. The taste of him was wine-sweet. Her dirk lay close. How easy it would be to kill him. Oren released her wrist, fingers trailing along the inside of her arm, an exquisite sensation. This was no clumsy soldier-husband sating animal appetites at her expense, but a joyful man-child who wanted only to share with her his pleasure. That realization stayed her hand.

His full warm lips found the hollows of her cheeks and her eyelids, and Corlain relaxed imperceptibly under his kisses. Even so, he seemed aware of it, for he sat back, smiling, and gently unfastened her jerkin. She shivered as his hands slid over her breasts.

"There's more to the night than dreams," the boy murmured and bent to kiss her again.

Corlain found she could no longer remain passive under the fingers that stroked her. She reached out and drew him down against her, wondering at his firm young body. His touch was fire. Red-haired Northerner, magician...fey. Groaning with pleasure, and with Darking Wood all about them, they made passionate love deep into the night.

At long last he moved to lie beside her, his head tucked against her shoulder, his soft hair drifting across her breast.

"You must take me with you to Gamehest," he said gently.

"No," growled Corlain. "You're too young to die."

"Neither of us shall die. There's a way to destroy the old wizard, and I can help you do it."

"How? With your lute?"

"Yes! Just listen. I've heard tales from Norshire. Scrim has grown arrogant of late. So sure of himself is he that he holds Hest Hall alone and virtually without defenses. They say he welcomes attack, though few have attempted it and none survived. But with me beside you, Corlain...I can hold him with my lute long enough for you to strike with your sword."

"Oh, Oren, reckless child. I nearly killed you myself."

"With your dirk. I know." He levered himself onto an elbow.

"You know?"

He rose to his knees and pulled her up against him. "It was worth the risk," Oren whispered fiercely. "I'll give you a daughter, red-haired and fiery. A worthy heir to Gamehest...and heir to much much more!"

THEY RODE WITH THE WIND AT THEIR BACKS. CORLAIN had begun this journey without hope, moving slowly, purposefully toward Gamehest. But Oren raced eagerly toward their fate, drawing her in his wake. The red mare flew along the road, neck extended, nostrils flared, while Nari, huge and rough-boned, fought to stay abreast. The days were spent thus, with wild bursts of speed mixed with languorous pauses beside a creek or pond where they rested the horses and bathed away the dust and sweat of summer. The nights, though, were spent in music and love-

making, in the wonder of Oren's gifts between dusk and dawn.

Near the end of the fourth day, they passed without mishap from Darking Wood and into the open rolling downs of Norshire. Here were thickets of rosemary and furze clinging stubbornly to the thin soil. Only a league beyond the forest another, less-traveled road turned west—the road to Gamehest. Once it had been lined by stately plane trees set as windbreaks all along the stone-fenced fields, but the trees were now gaunt, leafless things. The tenants' cottages stood empty, crumbling, the fields bare of livestock and crops. Whatever purpose the wizard had in taking Gamehest, it had not been to work the land. Its prosperity was gone, leaving behind a foul, decaying carcass, bereft of life.

CORLAIN MOVED SIGHTLESSLY THROUGH THE RUINS OF her childhood. They neared the end of their journey, closing with Hest Hall—a gray, brooding castle that kept lonely vigil on a holm within Gree Bog in the westernmost reaches of Gamehest. Even Oren had grown quiet, thoughtful, and perhaps apprehensive, but he flashed her a broad smile that only his eyes belied.

The road through the fen had been raised on a stone bed and earth-covered, but it too was falling to ruin, eaten away by long winters of neglect. The castle's portcullis stood open in baleful welcome, and they rode beneath its rusted spikes and into the main courtyard. The horses' ironshod hooves rang hollowly on the stone flagging. Here, among the weeds that choked the yard, Corlain was touched by the bitter memory of a morning long years past when she had first taken leave of Gamehest, receiving the sword from her mother's hand. She had promised then to return one day and take her place as heir, but her mother was dead five years before Corlain had ever had word of it. Another two years had passed before she could free herself of her warrior's pledge to the High Lord of Sorne in the eastern provinces. More than bitter was this homecoming.

Oren dismounted, and she followed suit, but when Corlain reached to untie the crossbow from her saddle, the boy laid a hand on her arm.

"Leave it," he said. "You have at your hip the only weapon capable of piercing the wizard's flesh." When she hesitated, he smiled. "Come, my lady. Scrim awaits us."

She followed, carrying the sword and her dirk in their sheaths. Oren had only his lute, strapped still across his back. Around them the day faded, the castle held in crepuscular shadow, but light blazed from the high, narrow windows of the great hall. Without hesitation, Oren led her toward it.

The oaken doors yielded, their hinges groaning complaint. At first glance the hall within appeared empty. The floor, of fine goram tile in huge alternating squares of black and white, lay bare of furnishing, and dust had settled in tiny drifts across it. The stone walls were covered with the tattered remnants of tapestries, and between them lighted torches in sconces fluttered in the draft from the open doors. Oren moved forward, and Corlain moved with him.

"He's there," the youth murmured and pointed through the weaving patterns of shadow and light to the far end of the hall.

She saw him then—Scrim, white-haired and fragile with age. He sat in a great wooden armchair that had belonged to Corlain's mother and her mother before her. The wizard sat still as death, his midnight robes draped loosely over his slight frame. From under the hem, red satin slippers peeked incongruously. He watched their approach without stirring until they stood a mere three paces from his chair.

"Oren," the old man growled, his voice strong and thick with anger.

The boy halted before him and performed a deep bow, graceful and yet somehow insolent.

"Father," he responded. Corlain froze, and Oren turned to her, grinning. "I told you I had relatives in Norshire." He turned back to the wizard. "And how are Karek and Biel?"

Scrim's rheumy milky blue eyes narrowed, a sly glint deep within

them. "Alas, your poor brothers are dead. They overstepped themselves, even as you do now, Oren. I know you come to steal my powers."

"Father dear," said Oren, a hand clapped over his heart. "I'm stung by your mistrust. I have come only on the behalf of a friend. Here beside me is the Lady Corlain Oscuel, who wishes to petition you for the return of her lands."

"Does she?" For the first time Scrim's pale gaze came to rest on Corlain, and she felt a deep wrenching pain in her stomach. The old man's lips curled into a leer. "Come here, woman."

Though her mind fought the actions of her limbs, she came to him. Scrim's bony fingers caught the fastenings of her jerkin and loosened them. Leathery hands stroked her breasts. She cringed inwardly, humiliation and rage trapped in a body that refused to obey her. His touch was fiery, familiar—like Oren's, only heavier, darker.

"Has he had you?" Scrim asked her. "I can offer you more."

His wheedling tone and papery dry flesh revolted her, yet Corlain's body responded.

"My gifts are far greater. I can show you the love of a true sorcerer." His fingers paused on her belly. "Bah!" Scrim struck her suddenly, a sharp blow across the face that sent her staggering back, free at last of his mental grip. "You've gotten her with child already," he snarled at Oren. "She's your creature. You plan to use her somehow to destroy me."

"No!" Corlain cried. "I want only what's rightfully mine. Give Gamehest back to me and you may leave here. No one will harm you."

Scrim chuckled. "Gamehest is mine."

"Of what use is it to you?" she demanded. "You sit here like a dragon over its treasure, and the treasure fades to nothing beneath you."

"Oren knows..." the wizard said, scowling. "Oren knows what treasure Gamehest holds, and he wants it for himself. You're a fool, woman, if you think otherwise."

"Father," Oren snapped and stepped close beside Corlain, his lute resting in his arms. "Shall I play you a tune?"

Fear caught at Corlain, and she saw it reflected briefly in the old man's eyes. There was something deadly in Oren's silken voice. He struck a discord, and the guts squalled in protest. The sound rushed like an ill wind through the hall, strident, angry, menacing.

Scrim leaped to his feet. His hands swept the air before him, and it began to ripple, to pulse.

"Your sword, Corlain!" Oren shouted at her over the thundering echo of the lute's stormy song.

But she had drawn it already, swinging the weapon high as she flung herself forward. With all her might, she brought it down on the wizard. The blade struck the shimmering curtain of air and slid harmlessly aside. Behind his shield the old man laughed soundlessly.

Even as the blow was deflected, Oren's cry reached her. "Name it! The sword is powerless against him unless it's called."

"Soulhest, strike!"

The sword answered her immediately, twisting in her grip, alive, vital. She lunged straight-armed, the blade held out before her, and this time the weapon slipped through Scrim's veil, drawing her with it. The air rippled around her, and Oren's lute was instantly silenced.

Now only the wizard's ragged breathing could be heard. The sword bit deep through cloth and flesh, and the old man cried out, falling back against the chair. His shield weakened momentarily, and Corlain heard Oren's voice, muted and distant, then gone again.

Scrim slid awkwardly from the chair to lie propped against its

But she had drawn it already, swinging the weapon high. With all her might, she brought it down on the wizard. The blade struck the shimmering curtain of air and slid harmlessly aside. Behind his shield the old man laughed soundlessly. Even as the blow was deflected, Oren's cry reached her. "Name it! The sword is powerless against him unless it's called."

legs. He seemed shriveled somehow, diminished, but his milky eyes still seethed with power, and an odd triumph filled his white face. Corlain bent over him, and he clutched convulsively at her arm.

"The sword...tell me," he commanded. "It was created here?"

"Yes," she answered. "In the armory below the castle."

"Of course," the wizard cackled though it caused him pain. "So clever, so very clever. He knew you'd return one day.... He had only to wait." When Corlain tried to draw the blade from his body, he cried out, "No, not yet! My life will leave with the steel. I must tell you a thing."

She crouched beside him, wary, and he chuckled again. "Woman, you've nothing to fear from me now. But Oren...yes, of him you'll know terror. Oh, so clever, my youngest, my last son. You think you've won Gamehest, but it's his now. Its treasure is his. Hest Hall...was built over a temple of the Old Ones. There's earth power here, great power, honed by the focus of their attention. Gone now...." The old wizard groaned in pain. "They're gone, but the power remains.... Beware of Oren. He's evil."

"No...."

"Fool! You're in his thrall already. His seed is planted in your womb. A girl child will be

born to you, but he dare not let it live—not to one day dispute his power even as he disputed mine. No. It's too late for you. With a touch he controls you. Even the sword. You've given him its name. Oren is your master now."



AVAGELY, CORLAIN TWISTED THE BLADE IN ITS SHEATH of flesh. Scrim shrieked and vomited a gout of foul black blood, then his eyes glazed, and the magical shield dissolved with his life. The young woman jerked the sword free and turned. Oren stood where his father's powers had held him, his face troubled. The lute, silent, was once more strapped to his back.

"Dead?" he asked.

Corlain nodded dumbly, then wiped the blood from Soulhest on her breeches and shoved it into the scabbard.

"Then we've won, Corlain. We've won!"

Oren came to her, his hands closing on her upper arms, and at his touch, desire flared in her. His eyes were fever-bright. How impossibly clear and ingenuous they were. How impossibly complex was the mind behind them. He pulled her close and kissed her, his body pressed to hers, promising...promising....

He hardly reacted to the razor sharp dirk when she pushed it gently upward into his solar plexus. Then he gasped, one quick hissing intake of air, and Corlain stepped back, the knife and her hands covered with his blood. When his knees failed him, and he began to crumple bonelessly, she caught him, lowering him carefully to the floor, propping his head with the lute.

"Why?" he whispered, and the complete and utter confusion in his face struck her like a blow. She had no answer for him, nor the time to find one. His eyelids fluttered and closed, and his fine young features slackened, losing all expression.

Corlain flung the dirk from her, heard it clatter across the tiles. Scrim still lay against the chair, and she kicked his body aside, then took her rightful seat. Hers. Gamehest was hers and something more. She covered her stomach with bloodied hands. A daughter. An heir.

Unnoticed, tears flooded her cheeks and dripped from the edge of her jaw. A daughter! Red-haired, Northern...fey. ♣

PEST CONTROL

Did you ever have any work done on your house? Fun wasn't it? Would you ever do it again even if your life depended on it? You'll see it could have been worse....

BY CHUCK ROTHMAN
Illustration by Gary Yealdhall

BARRY SURVEYED THE DAMAGE TO THE FRONT LAWN: THE GRASS torn up, the dirt strewn about. The dug-out area looked like a small minefield. It had to be trolls.

It was always one thing after another. Last year, they had discovered fairies in the bottom of the garden, and the rose bushes still hadn't recovered.

"We have to *do* something about it," Jane said.

"I don't know what. I hear trolls won't leave until they find whatever they're looking for," said Barry.

The turned-up dirt stirred and the golf-ball-sized head of a troll poked out of the dirt. "Would you mind?" came a sleepy, gruff voice, seemingly too loud to come out of the tiny mouth. "We need to get our rest, you know. Busy night tonight."

"Let me try talking with them," Barry said to Jane. He turned to the troll. "You know, you're making a mess of our lawn."

The troll looked around. "Looks OK to me. Except for the ugly green spots, of course."

"But we *want* the grass. Could you just stop digging and leave us alone?"

The troll shook his head. "We have our orders. The Mountain King thinks he dropped his ring of power here a couple of thousand years ago. We got to find it."

"But it may not be here after all this time!"

"Well, don't blame us. We just got the order. Don't worry," the little man said soothingly. "It shouldn't take more than a century or two. If we don't find it by then, we'll call it quits."

"But"



"Mom! Dad!" Caroline came screeching out of the house, her hair uncombed, a serious indication of her agitation. "There's an elf in my room! He made a...a gesture with those pointed ears of his! Daddy, he saw me in my underwear."

"I'd love to chat, but I do need my sleep. I'd appreciate it if you kept it quiet during the daylight hours."

The words gave Barry an idea. "I don't know," he said. "We can be very noisy at times."

The troll sighed. "I had hoped for some sort of peaceful coexistence while we finished our job. But just remember: We work at night. We try to be good neighbors and dig quietly. But if you're going to be that way, I'll have the guys get out the jackhammers." The troll smiled, showing uneven, brown-stained teeth. "Up to you, mister." It burrowed down into the dug-up earth.

"If I had known the housing development used to be an enchanted forest," Jane said, not for the first time, "I'd never have let you buy—"

"Mom! Dad!" Caroline came screeching out of the house, her hair uncombed, a serious indication of her agitation. "There's an elf in my room!"

"Elves, too?" Barry had heard they made trolls seem like a picnic.

"He made a...a gesture with those pointed ears of his! Daddy, he saw me in my underwear."

"I'll see what I can—"

"Barry," Jane said, "you are *not* going to do it yourself. I want a professional, and I want him here tomorrow, before anything else shows up!"

"But we can't afford—"

"The O'Malleys next door were able to afford someone, and they don't earn half what we do."

"The O'Malleys had leprechauns," Barry pointed out. "They used the pots of gold to pay for it."

There was a rustling in the bushes. Two small unicorns peered out, then began to run toward Caroline.

"Damn it, Daddy," she said, spotting them. "Now they're going to want to rest their heads in my lap again. Do you know how *embarrassing* it is to have everyone in the senior class know about my personal life?"

"Young lady," Jane said. "If I ever—"

Barry had had enough. "All right! Jane, as soon as I get to work, I'll call an exterminator."

THE TRUCK DROVE INTO THE DRIVEWAY THE NEXT morning: A run-down van, painted bright yellow, with the words "Sherman Exterminators—Got Vermin? Call Sherman!" painted in screaming red letters.

"You're Barry Baxter?" said the exterminator, a short stubby man—barely larger than an overgrown troll—who smoked a small cigar and wore a pair of horn-rimmed glasses.

Barry nodded, staring at the sign on the truck. "I thought you'd be more...discrete, Mr. Sherman."

"Never hurts to advertise," Sherman said. He surveyed the lawn, which was now pockmarked with craters. "Besides, I'm sure the neighbors already know. Let me take a look-see." He walked into the center of the lawn, rubbing his hands on the sides of his coveralls. He tossed the cigar down on the dirt, crushed it beneath his feet, then whistled.

"Does he really know what he's doing, Barry?" Jane whispered as she watched the man kick the dirt.

"He was the only one available on short notice; everyone else was booked up for months. It's goblin season, after all."

"Yup," Sherman said returning from his inspection. "Looks like

you've got trolls."

"We knew that," Jane said.

"Oh, I see," Sherman said. "And tell me, how long have *you* been in pest control?"

"Me? I—"

"So after your *vast* years of experience, you want to tell a professional what to do. Maybe you can do *everything* yourself, then."

Jane turned red.

"What you got here, Mr. and Mrs. Baxter, are your plain garden trolls. Shouldn't be too tough." Sherman looked in his pocket and found another cigar. "You said you got elves, too?"

Barry nodded. "In the house."

"Ah. House elves. Anything else?"

"Well," said Barry. "Our daughter complains about attracting unicorns. She can't stay outside five minutes before they come running."

"I can't do anything about unicorns. No one can. You'll just have to put up with them until..." Sherman gave him a wink. "My boy Gus had the same problem, too." Sherman lit his cigar. "Looks like I'd better get down to work. I'll get Gus and we can start laying the traps."

"You trap the trolls?"

Sherman laughed. "Trolls are too smart to be trapped. No, I'm talking about elftraps. We'll set a few of them around the house and it should take care of your problem." He lowered his voice confidentially. "Now don't you worry, Mr. and Mrs. Baxter. You'll be free of these pests in a few days."

"THE BIG TROUBLE WITH ELVES," SAID SHERMAN AS HE UNLOADED his truck, "is their droppings."

"Droppings?" It was something that Barry hadn't considered.

"Oh, sure. Your average elf just minds his own business, stealing a few crumbs of food here and there. Or whatever strikes their fancy; they're pack rats, the bunch of them. But it's the droppings that makes them unpleasant. You know, that little multicolored sparkly stuff? Some people call it fairy dust, but fairies are—"

"Maybe you'd like to get started," Barry said, not warming to the subject.

"Oh, right. Right." Sherman grinned. "Gus! Start laying the traps."

Gus, a gangly boy just past 20, nodded sullenly and, grabbing a box of small steel boxes, went into the house.

"How do you plan to get rid of the trolls?" Barry asked. "I've heard they won't leave until they find what they want."

"A popular misconception. No, magic will do it every time." He took a small wand from his tool kit and walked to the edge of the devastation.

A troll's head popped out of the dirt as Sherman knelt down to do his work. "Don't you know people are trying to sleep?" he asked. Then, the troll's tiny eyes narrowed as it spotted the van.

"Aha," said the troll. He pointed at Barry. "You called in an exterminator!"

"I..."

"No more good neighbor," the troll said. "You'll see."

Sherman was making marks in the dirt, oblivious to the troll's words. "Does a pentagram have five sides or six?" he asked.

"Five," said Barry, his doubts about Sherman growing.

Sherman nodded. "Thanks," he said, marking out the figure. "I always have trouble keeping that straight." He made a few adjustments. "There," he said, standing inside.

He raised the wand and began to intone, "*Stug rehpgoy mirgy saerg,*" he said with great gravity. "*Fos bolg neerg taerg!*" He smiled at Barry. "That should do it."

The troll frowned, then his face lit up and he began to laugh. "That old spell! I haven't heard that in a millennium!"

Sherman nodded at Barry. "It's a very traditional spell."

"And it didn't do any good then, either," said the troll. "That couldn't ward off a sick pixie."

Sherman smiled. "Don't let his bravado fool you, Mr. Baxter. He's planning to pack up his bags already. Just one more incantation." He lifted up the wand and, with great dignity, added slowly, "*Rehtomisy doemos eb yank cuda!*"

The troll was roaring with laughter. "Oh, man," he said. "Is this guy for real?"

"It doesn't seem to be working," Barry said.

"That's what he wants us to think," Sherman said. "But by tonight, they'll all be gone."

Barry kept thinking about the troll's threat. "I don't know. Maybe you should try it again."

"Look, Baxter, I can say them all day. Even backwards if you like. But there's no point. They work. They always work." He puffed triumphantly on his cigar. "The trolls will be gone in a couple of hours and we'll only have the elves to worry about."

"Well," Barry said. "As long as you're sure."

"Of course I'm sure," said Sherman. "I'm a professional."

AT BREAKFAST, BARRY'S HEAD THROBBED, AS though the trolls' jackhammers were still reverberating inside his skull. He took another sip of his coffee, hoping that the jolt of hot, sweet caffeine might somehow replace an entire night without sleep. Jane lifted the top of the sugar bowl. "What makes the sugar so sparkly?" she asked as she spooned it over her cereal. "It looks like fairy dust."

Barry spit his coffee back into the cup.

"Barry?" said Jane, looking out the window and not noticing. "The exterminator's here. I want you to go right out and talk to him."

"I—?"

"No excuses. Right now." She took a spoonful of cornflakes as if to say that there was nothing else she'd be interested in hearing.

Barry shrugged.

"So," said Sherman, surveying the noticeably larger patch of brown on the lawn. "Looks like things worked out OK."

"OK! They're still here!"

Sherman looked around. "Are you sure?"

"They kept me up all night with their jackhammers!"

"Jackhammers?" said Sherman. "Nah, trolls don't use jackhammers."

"That's what it sounded like."

"Oh," said Sherman. "Since when are *you* an expert? If you know so much, maybe you'd like to get rid of them yourself."

"I was—"

"Sure, sure. I spend 20 years learning my trade and I have to listen to people who couldn't tell a fairy from a pixie."

"Well, whatever it was, they made a hell of a lot of noise—"

Sherman puffed out a cloud of cigar smoke. "Catch any elves?"

Barry had forgotten about the elves. "I haven't taken a look."

"Oh, you don't have to look. It's the smell that gives them away."

Sherman crouched down beside the trolls' area. "A dead elf stinks awfully fierce. Sort of like skunk, only a lot ranker."

"Maybe I'd better check."

"No. Gus can handle it." He got to his feet. "Well, on closer look, it does seem like I didn't quite get them all. But don't you worry." He went back to his van.

"What are you doing?" Barry asked.

"Well, these guys are obviously resistant to magic. Sometimes that happens, sort of like germs that aren't bothered by antibiotics. But don't worry. That's why I have a blowtorch."

"Blowtorch! Is that necessary?"

"Never known it to fail," Sherman said. He took out a small propane torch from the van. "Little buggers can't stand heat."

"But things are pretty dry—"

"All the more reason to be careful. I know how you might be concerned about this, Baxter. But this will do the trick."

"That's what you said about the magic."

Sherman nodded. "Exactly." He opened the valve and lit the gas with a striker, watching it burst into blue flame. "It's like any other pest. Make it uncomfortable and it'll skedaddle off into the sunset. After all, would you stick around if one of these ..." He waved the flame, "was burning your ass?"

"Well,...no."

"I'll admit I was a tad off base with the spell, but sometimes a job turns out to be different from what you first thought. I'm sure you have things like that happening to you at work all the time, don't you?"

Barry found himself nodding. And, after all, you used the same sort of torch to remove old paint. "As long as you know what you're doing."

"Of course I do," said Sherman. "I'm a professional."

THE FIRE DEPARTMENT WAS VERY UNDERSTANDING, AND BARRY thanked them profusely for their quick response. Of course, it was disappointing to see the trolls dancing in the flames and rubbing them against themselves as though they were in a shower. They promised an interesting evening.

"This is a little harder than I first thought, but I know what to do now," Sherman said, getting into his van. "I'll be back tomorrow, with the right equipment this time."

"No, you won't," said Barry. "I don't want to see you here again!"

Sherman started up the engine. "I know you don't really mean that, Baxter."

"This was the worst case of idiotic incompetency I have ever seen! I don't want you back on my property!"

Sherman lit a new cigar. "No need to get hysterical, Baxter. I've got a handle on it now." He started up the van.

"You're fired!" Barry shouted after him as he drove off. Sherman gave a jaunty wave back as he rounded the corner and vanished down the street.

"Did you talk to him?" Jane asked when Barry got into the house.

"Yes," said Barry. "But I don't think he listened to me."

"Well, could you help me out for a minute? There's some kind of horrible smell coming from my dresser."

Barry sighed. "I'll see what I can do."

AND WHAT DO YOU CALL THIS!" BARRY SAID TRIUMPHANTLY the next day, as he held up one of the trolls' tiny jackhammers. He had wrestled it away from one of the creatures while nearly crazed from lack of sleep. It had done nothing to cut down on the din.

Sherman looked at it carefully. "That's an air hammer."

"You said trolls never use them."

"I said trolls never use jackhammers." Sherman spoke slowly, as though he were talking with a particularly slow child. "I never said anything about air hammers."

"But—"

"You want to hear the good news, or not?"

Barry sighed. "Yes," he said. "I can use some good news."

"Gus found one of the elves. It was just outside the front step."

"I know," Barry said. "I had to toss it out there. It was in my wife's underwear drawer."

Sherman nodded. "Yeah. The little perverts like to crawl around in places like that." He took a tank from his van and began strapping it on his back. "Look, Baxter, I'm sorry about yesterday. I made a mistake." The tank gurgled as he picked it up. "But I'm on the right track now." He pulled a helmet over his head, then lifted the sprayer. "This'll do the trick. Believe me, you'll be thanking me when the day is through." He began walking to the troll damage, which now looked like a small desert of desolation.

Continued on page 86



THE LAND DOWN UNDER

BY BILLIE SUE MOSIMAN

Illustration by Mary O'Keefe Young

*I*t has always been said that I possess the skill to heal the mind-sick and, therefore, they come to me as they always have, even now in my final days.

I had taken an apprentice and taught her all I knew. She was ready, she said, but I know she is as timid as a field mouse. Her confidence, for all her intuitive powers, is still lacking. She now stays in her oceanside home not far from me, practicing and gathering the necessary strength she needs to be of service. So I have been working alone.

It is Mabina, my daughter's youngest child, who has been with me in these last days. And I would go gladly now, were it not that Mabina is ill and needs my help. If I cannot save the one I love most, then my life is not complete and I will die impoverished of spirit.

"Shall I stoke the fire?" Mabina asked.

I could hear her across the room, but I could not see her well. The light, the little of it that we were privileged to receive beneath the great forest canopy, had fallen out of the sky, and the room was dim. "Please," I said. "I'm cold. It seems the nights aren't as warm as they used to be—when I was young," I added, not meaning to. A skilled one should not take unto herself pity the way I just had. *Of course* I was cold, and the nights as they slithered forth were colder to my bones. *Of course* I was old, and the nights had never bothered me when I was young. Nothing did. Nothing bothered me then, not fluctuations in temperature or material deprivation, not the loss of my mate, or even the thought that an age was passing before my eyes, never to be seen again on this Earth, unto all time.

This was something I knew and had not told. There would be no more centuries. No more visits from Invaders to save us, no more beings with strange machines to explain our natures. There was an End, and though it was still decades away, I knew we were all heading toward final extinction. I had seen it when I was but a child and never, never spoke of it.

We had lived on this small spinning ball through the time of space travel and intergalactic war, through plague, pestilence, and invasion. Now we had returned to a simpler way of life, which had greatly improved since the Invaders of 2442 taught us that we could use our brains for more than storage and retrieval. I would not foretell doom when we had just finally come to know a way of life that was tolerable.

I heard the rustling of wings outside the open window and turned to spy a red-tail bird try to perch on a slick, broad banana leaf and, failing, fly off again.

WHEN I TURNED BACK TO MABINA, SHE HAD FINISHED with the fire and now she sat across from me on a foot stool, her prim hands lying quietly in her lap. The brocade of her dress shone with silver and metallic green thread. Her hair, gold, as was mine so long ago, caught the glow from the table lamp. She wanted something and I couldn't think what it might be. I waited for her to say. Finally, "Grand, why do people die?"

"I don't know, Mabina. It seems unfair to me and no one's ever fully explained it to my satisfaction. It's just part of the cycle, the Invaders say, though what that might mean beyond living on faith, I could not tell you."

"Then what good is magic and intuition and healing if we don't know why people die?"

"Magic helps us to cope with the torment of those unanswerable questions."

I waited. It was the chief tool I owned, patience. Given the benefit of time, every man and woman talked, every solution possible was found, every illness of the mind could be set at ease.

"My mother says I am mind-sick and need you." Mabina glanced away and now I saw her profile in the lamplight, the strong line of the nose, the soft dip from her chin to the gracefully arched throat. She looked nothing at all like me, except for the color of her hair. I had never been a beautiful creature like this.

"I am here to help," I said. "Shall we eat now and talk afterward?"

She rose and joined me at the set table. A breeze came through the windows from the forest, a night breeze fragrant with scent from white blooms larger than my hand, with soil fertile and ripe, and with the spice of the green, impenetrable jungle. Miles away was the shore and the flat wide sea.

I did not have to live in the crumbling cities, under the protection of a lord. I was free to live wherever I wanted, just so long as the sick could be dispatched to me and could find a way to my door. I had chosen this tropical paradise in Baja California when I was a young woman. This haven was a hundred miles from civilization, but it was not too far, and it did give me my earned peace when I had no patient to attend. And now, at the last, with time passing rapidly

through my fingers and life leaving inch by inch, I was glad to be in the land down under the tree canopy, hidden from the open sky. The shadows stole around, urging me in sibilant hisses to join them. I would ignore them until I had no other choice.

Would I have time left to repair my lovely granddaughter?

I could partake of little food now, no matter how well prepared or how tasty. Mabina ate hardly more. There was a gloom in her aura and a hidden chamber behind her eyes where her soul thrashed about, ravished by something I did not yet understand.

When she took our plates away, I said, "Don't wash them just yet. Let's sit on the porch."

SHE HELPED ME FROM THE CHAIR AND GUIDED ME through the door and to a wicker settee. Fireflies sailed dances in front of us, their tails twinkling like dying-birthing-dying planets. "I used to catch them in my hands," I said, "and hold them cupped to study their light until they expired." I smiled at Mabina. "I was not a very smart girl at one time, curiously enough."

Again I waited. I studied the vine that grew wild around the legs of the wicker. The leaves were shaped like hearts and the scarlet flowers were funnels for butterfly nectar. I breathed deep, smelling the loam just beyond the porch and the dew settling on peppermint plants and lemon balm and marjoram.

Mabina sighed as loudly as any actor from a stage. I watched her carefully while her eyes followed the fireflies come out to play. "I want to marry this man," she said, "but I can't let myself."

"Why is that? You're of a marrying age. It's time for love, dear child. Love is all that should appeal to you at this time of your life."

"I dream...of bandits who kill him. Of the sea swallowing him whole. Of the mountains falling to crush him beneath tons of rock."

I thought of all these things as dreams, as nightmares, and saw how it could turn her mind away from all youthful pursuit. "Does he know you fear for his life?"

"I have never spoken of it until now. Every time I look on his face, I see it—a great disaster befalling him." She squeezed shut her eyes. A dragonfly, iridescent aqua wings wide and eager in the twilight, landed hovering on her shoulder, but Mabina did not notice.

Perhaps that was it. My intuition told me to ask. "What do you ponder when you are alone, child?"

She opened her eyes. "Alone?"

"Yes. If you were sitting here on the porch alone, what would you consider, what would collect your attention?"

"Oh, I would think of him. And know he is to die. I would grieve."

I took one of her pale cool hands in my own. "Do you not see the trumpet vine flower, the way it holds the droplets of moisture for the butterfly? Do you not notice the light dripping into the earth from the sky, filtering down all around us and soaking into the ground at our feet?"

Mabina looked around her. "I never see it. I don't know morning from evening, night from day."

"You see inside your head. You live inside your head. You have forsaken the world, Mabina, for the land where you walk alone in fear."

"How can I stop? I would stop if I could, wouldn't I? Oh, Grand, help me, give me courage."

I was taken then by pain that traveled like a cock through a hen yard—taken boldly, leapt upon against my will. I clutched my granddaughter to my bosom to keep from falling forward. I could not breathe for the pain, could not see any farther than her shoulder where blackness camped, ready to whisk me into Death's arms.

"Grand...?"

I could hear her calling to me and I made an effort to come back toward her, away from the encroaching dark. "I...I..."

She slipped from the settee and lowered me down onto the pillows. I grasped her hand tightly to hold onto the world a little longer.

And it passed as it has done before. But the pain is stronger each

time it comes. It will sweep me soon to oblivion.

"What shall I do, Grand? Tell me what to do!"

I patted her hand and said, "Help me up. I'm better."

"If you leave me now, I'll never get well. I need you so, Grand, please don't leave me yet."

It is like the young, or is it just the living of any age, to ask of the dying that they wait. They don't mean to be selfish. It is part of being alive. The largest part. The part I let go of more each day.

"Help me inside. I should lie down on the bed."

She is a gentle child, worth any agony to save. She has loved me for so many years. When she was young, my daughter sent her to me to receive training to be a lady. She possessed no magical skills, so her only future lay in society. She listened well and learned quickly. She snuggled against me and told me often how much she loved me and how she wished she could have been gifted so that she too might be apprenticed. Yet she accepted her fate, as the highborn will, and she went away from me polished, pleasant, and wellmannered enough to sit with any lord and not embarrass our name.

After five years she found a love and he came to kneel before her, asking for a life together, for children and a home. That's when the trouble started, I was told. Soon after the courtship and proposal, whenever she looked on him, she saw her heart shriveling in widowhood. She, without second sight, without any gift at all, had fallen into sickness instead.

Now she has been sent to me again, when I am least capable and most needed.

I lay on my back, staring at the rough board ceiling overhead. I had never pretended I could take someone from the Inside to the Outside in so short a time as was left to me. I didn't know if it was possible. I felt her climb onto the feather mattress and snuggle the way she did when she was a child. I put my arm around her and said, "Tell me what you're thinking."

"This minute? Must I?"

"Please."

"I see the ground covering you. The dirt thick, shutting you away from me. I see funeral wreaths and everyone wearing a head covering. I see myself weeping and lonely."

I blinked my eyes and saw the same vision. Soon enough it would be so. If only it was not too soon. "Why do you not see my old liver-spotted hand on your arm, child? And the weave of my dress? And the light shimmering over the ceiling from the fire? These things are here, now, just beyond your nose."

"I want to. I truly do, Grand."

"You don't have the sight, Mabina. You were denied all skill the day you were born. That is not a failing or a punishment, and it is nothing you have control over. You see me dead, but not through any prior knowledge save what any human could project knowing how old and decayed my body is. Do you understand?"

"I'm making it up, is that what I'm doing?"

"Not exactly. Not my death, for that's ordained and any decently empathetic person could know it by looking at me. But your young man, that is a different case. You fear losing him, is that so?"

"The way I fear losing you."

AFTER FIVE YEARS SHE found A love and he came to kneel before her, asking for a life together, for children and a home. That's when the trouble started, I was told. Soon after the courtship and proposal, whenever she looked on him, she saw her heart shriveling in widowhood. She, without second sight, without any gift at all, had fallen into sickness instead. Now she has been sent to me again, when I am least capable and most needed.

"You see? It is not the same. I have used up my years. Your young man has decades to go and you dream of losing him young, but there's no truth in those visions. It is like the man who thinks himself sick until he is sick. Remember Uncle Devlini?"

I heard her give a slight giggle and stuff the pillow in her mouth. I smiled at the ceiling.

"Remember how he always complained that his back hurt, his legs hurt, and he could not move his bowels?"

"He wouldn't eat duck for fear it would poison him! He thought every mosquito bite must be a snake bite! He thought the Invaders had infected him with a slow-killing virus."

"Yes, that's what he made himself believe, didn't he? For years he did this. He would not come to me to be cured of the mind-sickness. He rather liked the puny feeling he got when he complained, don't you think?"

"I suppose he did. But Grand, this isn't the same. I don't like seeing someone dying."

"I didn't say that, now did I? I said we must investigate these things. You're living inside, and as long as you do that, you make the world full of danger and despair. Just as Uncle Devlini did."

She was quiet a long time. I waited, hoping she could find a way to understand.

"How do I make the dreams stop?"

"Embrace the world, Mabina. Hug life and hold tightly to it. Live

IT WAS SAID THAT IN THE 21ST century, humans had finally learned to turn from material possessions and pleasures to the inner life, but then mankind forgot again and did not remember until the Invaders came. It seemed to me it was beginning all over again, men and women forgetting the interior landscape for the outer, the joy of small pleasure for the sudden, quick excitements of solid reality....How could we let what the Invaders taught us go by the wayside so easily?

now, now when you can hear my voice, when you can feel my arms around you, when the night is cooling and blowing through the windows to caress us with fresh breezes from the sea. Now, when the fire shadows dance across us. When the flowers fill the air with such sweetness."

She slept then, never moving from where she lay cuddled at my side. I did not wake her to undress or to find us a cover. We would be warm until we got cold, we would sleep until we woke, we were in perfect harmony with our surroundings. It was said that in the 21st century, humans had finally learned to turn from material possessions and pleasures to the inner life, but then mankind forgot again and did not remember until the Invaders came. It seemed to me it was beginning all over again, men and women forgetting the interior landscape for the outer, the joy of small pleasure for the sudden, quick excitements of solid reality. It was as if we learned and unlearned at alarming rates. How could we let what the Invaders taught us go by the wayside so easily? It probably spelled our downfall and the extinction I foresaw in the vision I had as a child. There had been no explanation. Only...emptiness. A great silence and stillness over all the Earth.

I slipped my hand up from her arm and pressed my fingers to her forehead, where damp locks of golden hair covered her sleeping brow. I demanded her dreams be filled with joy, not distress.

It was toward early morning when I woke to her screams. She sat

up, eyes wide, waking to the last of the sound echoing in the room. "Oh! He was run through with a sword! Blood spilled down his legs and he fell dead."

Could she be under a spell, one put there by an enemy of the family? There were dark practitioners of the art, oh yes. Why or what caused her mind to sink into such low, perilous places?

I shushed her. Had her lie down again. "It will take practice to carry the good cheer of day into the dream world of sleep, child. There, there. He is well, I swear it."

She fell into my arms and sobbed with a broken heart. I felt my pain return and bit into my lip. I asked it to leave me, I had work to do, I couldn't be bothered this time.

That morning I slept late, in a deep sleep that kept me groggy until I had crawled from the bed and eaten the food Mabina prepared for me. She had been up hours, it seemed, and she looked livelier than the day before. There was a bloom of pink in her cheeks that matched the baby soft color on the bodice of her dress.

"What do you notice?" I asked, lifting the utensil to my old mouth to eat.

"You have a fine appetite!"

I laughed. "What else?"

She now looked around the house.

"It isn't fair that you hunt for life. What did you notice *before* you looked?" It was so difficult to teach her.

She shut her eyes and clasped her hands in front of her apron. "There were spots of grease on the griddle. They swirled and made a face, a funny little gnomelike Invader face."

"Good. Go on."

"When you sleep, you whistle-snore. Air goes in your nose and out your lips in a whistle."

"I hope that is not a secret you will tell just anyone."

"There was a bird...."

"What color?"

She paused and her brow furrowed. "Two colors. Green and yellow. A small bird, it would have fit into my hand. It landed on the windowsill while I baked."

"What color was its eye?"

"Eye?"

"You did see the bird's eye. If it landed on the sill, it was close enough for the two of you to exchange looks."

She cocked her head to the side, the way a bird will do, unconsciously imitating what she had seen. "It had a black eye."

"Good! Anything else?"

"It put out one wing, yellow, with green edging like lace, stretched it out fully, and then flew away."

"A good omen. This is indeed fine progress. Tell me, with your eyes closed, what do you smell, Mabina?"

"Camomile tea."

"Have you made tea?" I looked over to the stove. My teapot sat just off the burner. I could not smell it, but my senses were so dim these last days I had to be right on top of a thing to smell its scent.

"Oh yes, but I forgot to bring you a cup."

"Never mind. What else can you smell? You are blessed with fine nostrils. You must use them, unlike an old woman who uses hers for snoring."

She giggled but kept her eyes closed. Concentrating. Not thinking

about me in the ground, I hoped, or of her young man struck down in battle in one of our rebel village skirmishes.

"I smell my skin."

"And what does your skin smell like?"

"Like...horse flesh...and washed silk."

"Horse flesh!"

She opened her eyes now and they were merry. "I made that up."

"A fine joke on your grandmother. Bring my tea."

We spent the day in game. She never tired of it for she was better than I at spotting the tiny insignificant bits of matter that made up the universe. The trail of a slug who has lost his shell. The chewed leaf that hid below the healthy leaves on a thousand-leaf tree limb. The whorl of an ant trail leading into the green wall of jungle beating against my little clearing.

She never once told me her mind had slipped into the dungeon of sick imagining. It was not a spell. She was not so ill she could not be brought back to happiness.

That night we donned our gowns and sat before the fireplace to ward off the dampness. There had been a thunderstorm. We could hear it crack and boom, but we could not see the sky lighting up with streaks of molten silver. I told her that under the canopy we lost the stars and the firmament, the clouds and the sun rays, but the shadows suited me best and always had.

She sat too long brooding while I lived a while in the flames of the fire. When I came to myself, I caught her lost in reverie much as I had been. "What are you thinking?"

"He will leave on an errand for his father and while staying overnight in an inn, he will burn to death, burn down to embers."

I wanted to beat my hands on my forehead in exasperation. "You're living inside *again*. Where there are fabrications and where ugliness and sadness reside."

Her eyes, hollowed by shadow, fastened on my face. She could be me. She *would* be me one day, old and dying.

It was contagious! Her sorrow had slipped from behind her eyes and slithered on dead feet to hide behind mine. I would not have it. "Mabina, you must make an effort. I can't help you if you persist in wallowing in these horrible daydreams."

I hadn't wanted to be curt, but my words must have stung, for she turned away and wiped her eyes.

"I'm sorry, child. It's just that if you continue telling me about these gruesome visions, you will infect me. Think of this: if all I ever did was speak of evil, then the world from my viewpoint would be an evil place. If you heard me speak evil and only evil, always evil, it would rot your mind and take it over. You mustn't give in so easily to what floats through your thoughts."

"Perhaps it is too late," she said.

I stood then, bones aching from sitting too long. "I think we should go to bed. I want you to bring your mind back to the present. Keep it fettered in this house. Keep it close to you where you can watch it. Don't let it free to roam imaginary scenes that *have* not and *will* not happen."

A MESSENGER CAME THE NEXT MORNING WITH A SCROLL for Mabina. He left quickly, never asking if there was a response. I watched Mabina read it and watched, horrified, as she rocked on her feet and fainted dead away. She struck her head as she fell. I hurried to lift her. To pray for her. And then my gaze fell on the scroll's lettering. It was from my daughter. Mabina's young man had died in an accident on one of the old torn freeways we still traverse between city states. A bridge had collapsed and he was crushed beneath tons of concrete.

I looked down on Mabina's slack face. A dribble of blood came down from her gold hair, staining it strawberry.

Some time later, after I had bathed her head, she came awake. She cried until I thought her heart would surely beat its way through her

chest. I could not appease her grief or deny that her visions had been true warnings of things to come. But how could it be? She had never shown a gift before now. A woman rarely proved to be skilled this late in life. I had shown talent before I was four. Everyone I knew had experienced knowledge of their gifts when they were still small children. The Invaders had given us wondrous machines that indicated who was gifted and who was not. No light glowed when the state had applied it to our little Mabina.

That night I woke with a pain that doubled me over. I reached to feel for Mabina and found her. I shook her awake. I couldn't speak. I heard a deep groaning and wondered who it might be, who was in my house, in my bed, wailing with such vehemence and lack of self-control.

Mabina sat up in bed, frantic, and tried to straighten my limbs, but I couldn't untwist, the pain had me in its great hands, squeezing my life through claws.

Mabina stilled. Her voice came through my endless ribbon of pain like a song sung to a babe in a cradle. "You'll go soon and lie in the ground. I'll weep over you and miss you more than anyone else, more than your own children will I miss you. And when I call from this place, you'll hear me, for I see there is no death so deep that it keeps us silent forever."

I wanted to say, wanted to say, wanted to...say....

If you are right and I have been wrong, then you are more skilled than I. If you are right and I am wrong, I bless you and forgive myself for all my ignorance.

It was like falling into the darkness, my consciousness a star burning down, with a fierce trail left behind me so I would know I had gone.

MABINA BENT TO MY EAR AND SAID, "LET GO, GRAND. Let go this time. Think of fireflies on the porch and moon vines twirling around the posts. Think of the high green canopy and this land down under. Do you smell the rain-soaked earth? Do you feel my tears falling warm on your cheeks? Think of me, Grand, and live on, live free."

Still I fought to come back, not willing to give up earth for whatever came after. I struggled from the dark and fluttered open my eyes.

She helped me to sit. My breath came even and regular, though I felt perspiration on my face. "I'll give in soon, Mabina. Soon."

"You know now that I can take your place," she said, not resigned but sure of what the future held for her.

"I think you should, yes. You'll need to register with the Council of Five."

"Not until you have left me."

"Do you know...do you know if you'll be happy?" I asked, lying back in her arms, too weary to hold up my own weight.

She glanced around the room at my four-poster bed, at the stove, at the fireplace, and then to the open door to the porch and the jungle beyond. "I'll try. I don't know more than that. Not about my own fate."

I closed my eyes to rest. I was glad she did not see the future that I had seen. I'd have to find the strength to send away my apprentice. The Council would have to notify the farflung villagers of the change.

"Does death not keep us silent forever?" I asked. "We live on, you say. In some way? You're sure of that?"

She leaned to brush her lips against my old cheek. "Yes," she whispered. "I know that much. I can't tell you how or why, but I just know we do."

It was more than I had ever known. It was enough to serve me well in my last days, and I knew others would come to know Mabina's truth too, and it would give them strength in this last primitive age of humankind, in the planet's last hour before the gathering dusk. ♣

THIS STORY TAKES UP THE AFFAIRS OF MERLIN, SON OF Corwin, from where I left him at the end of *Prince of Chaos*, the 10th and most recent book in my *Amber* series. As a *Prince of Amber* on his father's side and a *Prince of Chaos* on his mother's, Merlin has some problems—not the least of these being that he finds himself in the line of succession for the recently vacated *Throne of Chaos*, a position he is not anxious to assume. He had felt himself well-protected from it by the number of claimants ahead of him. Unfortunately, they have been dying off most rapidly, generally by means other than the natural. He suspects his mother, Dara, and his half-brother, Mandor, of having a hand in this. But he recently faced both of them down in a magical duel, and they seem to have had second thoughts about his tractability, should one of them manage to seat him on the *Throne*. Time will tell. In the meantime, he went off to one of Mandor's guest houses, hoping for a good night's sleep.

THE SHROUDLING AND THE GUISEL

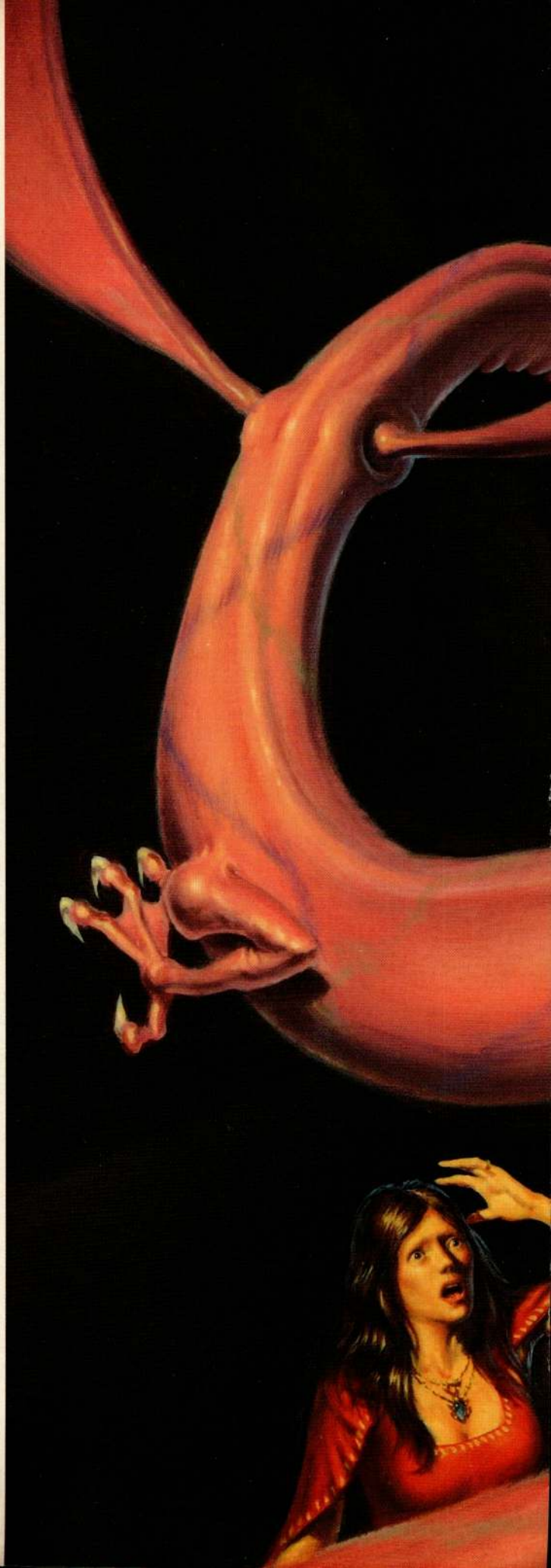
BY ROGER ZELAZNY

Illustration by Doug Andersen

I AWOKE IN A DARK ROOM, MAKING LOVE TO A lady I did not recall having gone to bed with. Life can be strange. Also oddly sweet at times. I hadn't the will to destroy our congress, and I went on and on with what I was doing and so did she until we came to that point of sudden giving and taking, that moment of balance and rest.

I made a gesture with my left hand and a small light appeared and glowed above our heads. She had long black hair and green eyes, and her cheekbones were high and her brow wide. She laughed when the light came on, revealing the teeth of a vampire. Her mouth held not a trace of blood, making it seem somehow impolite for me to touch my throat seeking after any trace of soreness. "It's been a long time, Merlin," she said softly.

"Madam, you have the advantage of me," I said.





She laughed again. "Hardly," she answered, and she moved in such a fashion as to distract me entirely, causing the entire chain of events to begin again on my part.

"Unfair," I said, staring into those sea-deep eyes, stroking that pale brow. There was something terribly familiar there, but I could not understand it.

"Think," she said, "for I wish to be remembered."

"I...Rhanda?" I asked.

"Your first love, as you were mine," she said smiling, "there in the mausoleum. Children at play, really. But it was sweet, was it not?"

"It still is," I replied, stroking her hair. "No, I never forgot you. Never thought to see you again, though, after finding that note saying your parents no longer permitted you to play with me...thinking me a vampire."

"It seemed so, my Prince of Chaos and of Amber. Your strange strengths and your magics..."

I looked at her mouth, at her unsheathed fangs. "Odd thing for a family of vampires to forbid," I stated.

"Vampires? We're not vampires," she said. "We are among the last of the shroudlings. There are only five families of us left in all the secret images of all the shadows from here to Amber—and farther, on into that place and into Chaos."

I held her more tightly and a long lifetime of strange lore passed through my head. Later I said, "Sorry, but I have no idea what a shroudling is."

Later still she responded, "I would be very surprised if you did, for we have always been a secret race." She opened her mouth to me, and I saw by spirit-light a slow retraction of her fangs into normal-seeming dentition. "They emerge in times of passion other than feasting," she remarked.

"So you do use them as a vampire would," I said.

"Or a ghoul," she said. "Their flesh is even richer than their blood."

"Their?" I said.

"That of those we would take."

"And who might they be?" I asked.

"Those the world might be better off without," she said. "Most of them simply vanish. Occasionally, with a feast of jesters, only parts of some remain."

I shook my head.

"Shroudling lady, I do not understand," I told her.

"We come and go where we would. We are an undetected people, a proud people. We live by a code of honor which has protected us against all your understanding. Even those who suspect us do not know where to turn to seek us."

"Yet you come to me and tell me these things."

"I have watched you much of my life. You would not betray us. You, too, live by a code."

"Watched me much of my life? How?"

But we distracted each other then and that moment came to a close. I would not let it die, however. Finally, as we lay side by side, I repeated it. By then, however, she was ready for it.

"I am the fleeting shadow in your mirror," she said. "I look out, yet you see me not. All of us have our pets, my love, a person or place of hobby. You have always been mine."

"Why do you come to me now, Rhanda?" I asked. "After all these years?"

She looked away.

"Mayhap you will die soon," she said after a time, "and I wished to recall our happy days together at Wildwood."

"Die soon? I live in danger. I can't deny it. I'm too near the Throne. But I've strong protectors—and I am stronger than people think."

"As I said, I have watched," she stated. "I do not doubt your prowess. I've seen you hang many spells and maintain them. Some of them I do not even understand."

"You are a sorceress?"

She shook her head. "My knowledge of these matters, while extensive, is purely academic," she said. "My own powers lie elsewhere."

"Where?" I inquired.

She gestured toward my wall. I stared. Finally, I said, "I don't

understand."

"Could you turn that thing up?" she asked, nodding toward the spirit-light.

I did so.

"Now move it into the vicinity of your mirror."

I did that also. The mirror was very dark, but so was everything else there in Mandor's guest house, where I had elected to spend the night following our recent reconciliation.

I got out of bed and crossed the room. The mirror was absolutely black, containing no reflection of anything. "Peculiar," I remarked.

"No," she said. "I closed it and locked it after I entered here. Likewise, every other mirror in the house."

"You came in by way of the mirror?"

"I did. I live in the mirrorworld."

"And your family? And the four other families you mentioned?"

"We all of us make our homes beyond the bounds of reflection."

"And from there you travel from place to place?"

"Indeed."

"Obviously, to watch your pets. And to eat people of whom you disapprove?"

"That, too."

"You're scary, Rhanda." I returned to the bed, seating myself on its edge. I took hold of her hand and held it. "And it is good to see you again. I wish you had come to me sooner."

"I have," she said, "using the sleep spells of our kind."

"I wish you had awakened me."

She nodded. "I would like to have stayed with you, or taken you home with me. But for this part of your life you are a certified danger bringer."

"It does seem that way," I agreed. "Still...Why are you here now, apart from the obvious?"

"The danger has spread. It involves us now."

"I actually thought that the danger in my life had been minimized a bit of late," I told her. "I have beaten off Dara's and Mandor's attempts to control me and come to an understanding of sorts with them."

"Yet still they will scheme."

I shrugged. "It is their nature. They know that I know, and they know I am their match. They know I am ready for them now. And my brother Jurt...we, too, seem to have reached an understanding. And Julia...we have been reconciled. We—"

She laughed. "Julia has already used your 'reconciliation' to try to turn Jurt against you again. I watched. I know. She stirs his jealousy with hints that she still cares more for you than for him. What she really wants is you removed, along with the seven in the running with you—and the others who stand ready. She would be queen in Chaos."

"She's no match for Dara," I said.

"Ever since she defeated Jasra, she's had a high opinion of herself. It has not occurred to her that Jasra had grown lazy and lost by a trick, not by a matter of power. She would rather believe her own strength greater than it is. And that is her weakness. She would be reunited with you to put you off-guard as well as to turn your brother against you once again."

"I am forewarned, and I thank you—though there are really only six others in the running for the Throne. I was number one, but a half dozen pretenders have recently turned up. You said seven. There's one I don't know about?"

"There is the hidden one," she said. "I do not know his name to tell you, though I know you saw him in Suhuy's pool. I know his appearance, Chaotic and human. I know that even Mandor considers him a worthy antagonist when it comes to scheming. Conversely, I believe Mandor is the main reason he removed himself to our realm. He fears Mandor."

"He inhabits the mirrorworld?"

"Yes, though he is not yet aware of our existence there. He found it by a near-impossible accident, but he simply thinks he has made a marvelous discovery—a secret way to go nearly anywhere, to see nearly anything without detection. Our people have avoided his awareness, using curves he cannot perceive let alone turn. It has

made him considerably more formidable in his path to the Throne."

"If he can look out—even listen—through any mirror without being detected; if he can step out, assassinate someone, and escape by the same route—yes, I can understand it."

The night suddenly seemed very cold. Rhanda's eyes widened. I moved to the chair where I had thrown my garments and began dressing myself.

"Yes, do that," she said.

"There's more, isn't there?"

"Yes. The hidden one has located and brought back an abomination to our peaceful realm. Somewhere, he found a guisel."

"What is a guisel?"

"A being out of our myth, one we had thought long exterminated in the mirrorworld. Its kind nearly destroyed the shroudclings. A monster, it took an entire family to destroy what was thought to be the last of them."

I buckled my sword belt and drew on my boots. I crossed the chamber to the mirror and held my hand before its blackness. Yes, it seemed the source of the cold.

"You closed them and locked them?" I said. "All of the mirrors in this vicinity?"

"The hidden one has sent the guisel through the ways of the mirrors to destroy nine rivals to the Throne. It is on its way to seek the tenth now: yourself."

"I see. Can it break your locks?"

"I don't know. Not easily, I wouldn't think. It brings the cold, however. It lurks just beyond the mirror. It knows that you are here."

"What does it look like?"

"A winged eel with a multitude of clawed legs. It is about 10 feet long."

"If we let it in?"

"It will attack you."

"If we enter the mirror ourselves?"

"It will attack you."

"On which side is it stronger?"

"The same on either, I think."

"Well, hell! Can we enter by a different mirror and sneak up on it?"

"Maybe."

"Let's give it a shot. Come on."

SHE ROSE, DRESSED QUICKLY IN A BLOOD-red garment, and followed me through a wall to a room that was actually several miles distant. Like most of the nobles of Chaos, brother Mandor believes in keeping a residence scattered. A long mirror hung on the far wall between the desk and a large Chaos clock. The clock, I saw, was about to chime a nonlinear for the observer. Great. I drew my blade.

"I didn't even know this one was here," she said.

"We're some distance from the room where I slept. Forget space. Take me through."

"I'd better warn you first," she said. "According to tradition, nobody's ever succeeded in killing a guisel with a sword, or purely by means of magic. Guisels can absorb spells and lashes of force. They can take terrible wounds and survive."

"Any suggestions then?"

"Baffle it, imprison it, banish it. That might be better than trying to kill it."

"OK, we'll play it as it's dealt. If I get into real bad trouble, you get the hell out."

She did not reply but took my hand and stepped into the mirror. As I followed her, the antique Chaos clock began to chime an irregular beat. The inside of the mirror seemed the same as the room without, but turned around. Rhanda led me to the farthest point of reflection, to the left, then stepped around a corner.

We came into a twisted, twilight place of towers and great residences, none of them familiar to me. The air bore clusters of wavy, crooked

lines here and there. She approached one, inserted her free hand, and stepped through it, taking me with her. We emerged on a crooked street lined with twisted buildings.

"Thank you," I said then, "for the warning and for the chance to strike."

She squeezed my hand.

"It is not just for you, but for my family, also, that I do it."

"I know that," I said.

"I would not be doing this if I did not believe that you have a chance against the thing. If I did not, I would simply have warned you and told you what I know. But I also remember one day...back in Wildwood...when you promised to be my champion. You seemed a real hero to me then."

I smiled as I recalled that gloomy day. We had been reading tales of chivalry in the mausoleum. In a fit of nobility I led her outside as the thunder rolled, and I stood among the grave markers of unknown mortals—Dennis Colt, Remo Williams, John Gaunt—and swore to be her champion if ever she needed one. She had kissed me then, and I had hoped for some immediate evil circumstance against which to pit myself on her behalf. But none occurred.

We moved ahead, and she counted doors, halting at the seventh. "That one," she said, "leads through the curves to the place behind the locked mirror in your room."

I released her hand and moved past her.

"All right," I said, "time to go a-guiseling," and I advanced. The guisel saved me the trouble of testing the curves by emerging before I got there.

Ten or 12 feet in length, it was, and eyeless as near as I could tell, with rapid-beating cilia all over what I took to be its head. It was very pink, with a long, green stripe passing about its body in one direction, and a blue one in the other. It raised its cilia-end three or four feet above the ground and swayed. It made a squeaking sound. It turned in my direction. Underneath it had a large, angled mouth like that of a shark; it opened and closed it several times and I saw many teeth. A green, venomous-seeming liquid dripped from that orifice to steam upon the ground.

I waited for it to come to me, and it did. I studied the way it moved—quickly, as it turned out—on the horde of small legs. I held my blade before me in an *en garde* position as I awaited its attack. I reviewed my spells.

It came on, and I hit it with my Runaway Buick and my Blazing Outhouse spells. In each instance, it stopped dead and waited for the spell to run its course. The air grew frigid and steamed about its mouth and midsection. It was as if it were digesting the magic and rushing it down entropy lane. When the steaming stopped, it advanced again and I hit it with my Demented Power Tools spell. Again, it halted, remained motionless, and steamed. This time I rushed forward and struck it a great blow with my blade. It rang like a bell, but nothing else happened, and I drew back as it stirred.

"It seems to eat my spells and excrete refrigeration," I said.

"This has been noted by others," Rhanda responded.

Even as we spoke, it torqued its body, moving that awful mouth to the top, and it lunged at me. I thrust my blade down its throat as its long legs clawed at or caught hold of me. I was driven over backwards as it closed its mouth, and I heard a shattering sound. I was left holding only a hilt. It had bitten off my blade. Frightened, I felt after my new power as the mouth opened again.

The gates of the spikard were opened, and I struck the creature with a raw force from somewhere in Shadow. Again, the thing seemed frozen as the air about me grew chill. I tore myself away from it, bleeding from dozens of small wounds. I rolled away and rose to my feet, still lashing it with the spikard, holding it cold. I tried using the blade to dismember it, but all it did was eat the attack and remain a statue of pink ice.

Reaching out through Shadow, I found myself another blade. With its tip, I traced a rectangle in the air, a bright circle at its center. I reached into it with my will and desire. After a moment, I felt contact.

"Dad! I feel you but I can't see you!"

"Ghostwheel," I said, "I am fighting for my life, and doubtless

those of many others. Come to me if you can."

"I am trying. But you have found your way into a strange space. I seem to be barred from entering there."

"Damn!"

"I agree. I have faced this problem before in my travels. It does not lend itself to ready resolution."

The guisel began to move again. I tried to maintain the Trump contact but it was fading. "Father!" Ghostwheel cried as I lost hold. "Try—" Then he was gone. I backed away. I glanced at Rhanda. Dozens of other shroudlings now stood with her, all of them wearing black, white, or red garments. They began to sing a strange, dirgelike song, as if a dark soundtrack were required for our struggle. It did seem to slow the guisel, and it reminded me of something from long ago.

I threw back my head and gave voice to that ululant cry I had heard once in a dream and never forgotten.

My friend came.

Kergma—the living equation—came sliding in from many angles at once. I watched and waited as he/she/it—I had never been certain—assembled itself. Kergma had been a childhood playmate, along with Glait and Gryll.

Rhanda must have remembered the being who could go anywhere, for I heard her gasp. Kergma passed around and around her body in greeting, then came to me and did the same.

"My friends! It has been so long since you called me to play! I have missed you!"

THE GUISEL DRAGGED ITSELF FORWARD against the song of the shroudlings as if beginning to overcome its power. "This is not a game," I answered. "That beast will destroy us all unless we nail it first," I said.

"Then I must solve it for us. Everything that lives is an equation, a complex quantum study. I told you that long ago."

"Yes. Try. Please."

I feared blasting the thing again with the spikard while Kergma worked on it, lest it interfere with his calculations. I kept my blade and spikard at ready as I continued to back away. The shroudlings retreated with me, slowly.

"A deadly balance," Kergma said at last. "It has a wonderful life equation. Use your toy to stop it now."

I froze it again with the spikard. The shroudlings' song went on.

At length Kergma said, "There is a weapon that can destroy it under the right circumstances. You must reach for it, however. It is a twisted blade you have wielded before. It hangs on the wall of a bar where once you drank with Luke."

"The Vorpall Sword?" I said. "It can kill it?"

"A piece at a time, under the proper circumstances."

"You know these circumstances?"

"I have solved for them."

I clutched my weapon and struck the guisel again with a force from the spikard. It squeaked and grew still. Then I discarded the blade I held and reached—far, far out through Shadow. I was a long time in finding what I sought and I had a resistance to overcome, so I added the force of the spikard to my own and it came to me. Once again, I held the shining, twisted Vorpall Sword in my hands.

I moved to strike at the guisel with it, but Kergma stopped me. So I hit it again with a lash of force from the spikard.

"Not the way. Not the way."

"What then?"

"We require a Dyson variation on the mirror equation."

"Show me."

Walls of mirrors shot up on all sides about me, the guisel, and Kergma, but excluding Rhanda. We rose into the air and drifted toward the center of the sphere. Our reflections came at us from everywhere.

"Now. But you must keep it from touching the walls."

"Save your equation. I may want to do something with it by and by."

I struck the dormant guisel with the Vorpall Sword. Again, it emitted a bell-like tone and remained quiescent.

"No," Kergma said. "Let it thaw."

So I waited until it began to stir, meaning that it would be able to attack me soon. Nothing is ever easy. From outside, I still heard the faint sounds of singing.

The guisel recovered more quickly than I had anticipated. But I swung and lopped off half of its head, which seemed to divide itself into tissue-thin images which then flew away in every direction.

"Caloo! Callay!" I cried, swinging again and removing a long section of tissue from its right side, which repeated the phenomenon of the ghosting and the flight. It came on again and I cut again. Another chunk departed from its twisting body in the same fashion. Whenever its writhing took it near a wall, I intervened with my body and sword, driving it back toward the center and hacking at or slicing it.

Again and again it came on or flipped toward the wall. Each time my response was similar. But it did not die. I fought it till but a tip of its writhing tail moved before me.

"Kergma," I said then, "we've sent most of it down infinite lines. Now, can you revise the equation? Then I'll find sufficient mass with the spikard to allow you to create another guisel for me—one that will return to the sender of this one and regard that person as prey."

"I think so," Kergma said. "I take it you left that final piece for the new one to eat?"

"Yes, that was my thinking."

And so it was done. When the walls came down, the new guisel—black, its stripes red and yellow—was rubbing against my ankles like a cat. The singing stopped.

"Go and seek the hidden one," I said, "and return his message."

It raced off, passing a curve and vanishing.

"What have you done?" Rhanda asked me. So I told her.

"The hidden one will now consider you the most dangerous of his rivals," she said, "if he lives. Probably he will increase his efforts against you, in subtlety as well as violence."

"Good," I said. "That is my hope. I'd like to force a confrontation. He will probably not feel safe in your world now either, never knowing when a new guisel might come a-hunting."

"True," she said. "You have been my champion," and she kissed me.

Just then, out of nowhere, a paw appeared and fell upon the blade I held. Its opposite waved two slips of paper before me. Then a soft voice spoke: "You keep borrowing the sword without signing for it. Kindly do that now, Merlin. The other slip is for last time." I found a ballpoint beneath my cloak and signed as the rest of the cat materialized. "That'll be \$40," it said then. "It costs 20 bucks for each hour or portion of an hour, to vorp."

I dug around in my pockets and came up with the fees. The cat grinned and began to fade. "Good doing business with you," it said through the smile. "Come back soon. The next drink's on the house. And bring Luke. He's a great baritone."

I noticed as it faded that the shroudling family had also vanished.

Kergma moved nearer. "Where are the others—Glait and Gryll?"

"I left Glait in a wood," I replied, "though he may well be back in the Windmaster's vase in Gramble's museum in the Ways of Sawall by now. If you see him, tell him that the bigger thing has not eaten me—and he will drink warm milk with me one night and hear more tales yet. Gryll, I believe, is in the employ of my Uncle Suhuy."

"Ah, the Windmaster...those were the days," he said. "Yes, we must get together and play again. Thank you for calling me for this one," and he slid off in many directions and was gone, like the others.

"What now?" Rhanda asked me.

"I am going home and back to bed." I hesitated, then said, "Come with me?"

She hesitated too, then nodded. "Let us finish the night as we began it," she said.

We walked through the seventh door and she unlocked my mirror. I knew that she would be gone when I awoke. ■

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Over the years we've seen the Devil play cards with Dan'l Webster, meet Robert Johnson at the crossroads, and go down to Georgia for a fiddle playing contest. You'd think he'd learn a little something about deals with humans by now....

THE REDEMPTION OF SILKY BILL

BY SARAH ZETTEL
Illustration by David Beck

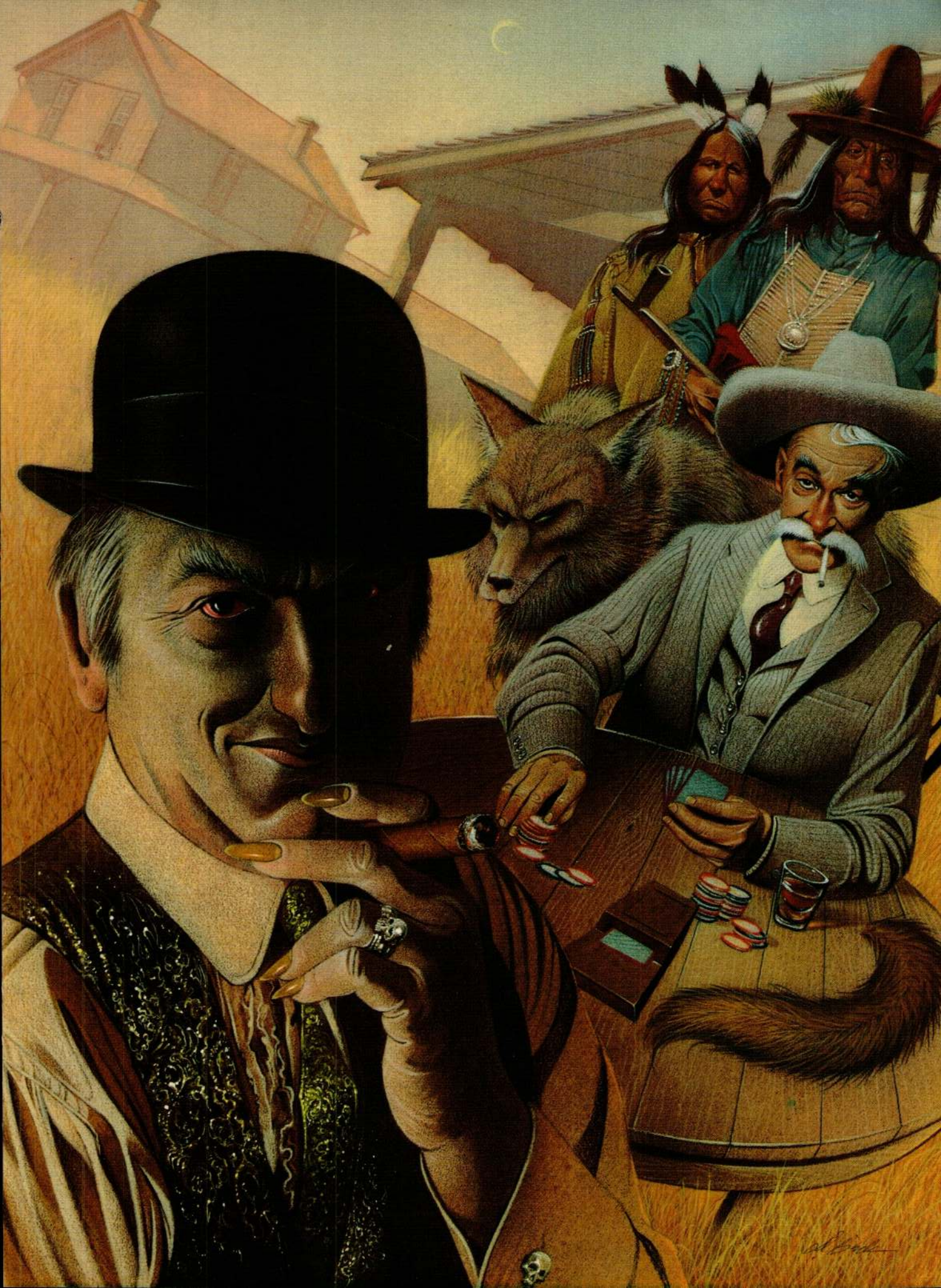
HE'LL EAT THE CHEYENNE TOO, YOU KNOW," said the coyote.

Standing-in-the-West picked up another log and rested it on the chopping stump. A fresh wind blew off the prairie, ruffling his newly cut hair and the cloth of his cotton shirt.

"Go away, Wihio."

The coyote looked toward the canvas enclosure that served Fort Summner as a church and then back to the Cheyenne brave wielding the steel axe as if it weighed no more than a feather. "You've forgotten who you are," said Wihio.

"No." Standing-in-the-West brought the axe down onto the wood. Thwak! "Peter Standing-in-the-West." Thwak! "He is good Christian." Thwak! "He helps Reverend." Thwak! "He preaches Bible book to red man." The log splintered in two. "And he has found a way to get rid of the white



PART OF HIS MIND ticked off the cards as they were played. Part of it calculated the possible order of the ones remaining in the spring-loaded box. He split his bets between cards. Carefully, he bet on the order of the last three cards to be drawn.



man using the white man's own medicine." He hefted the axe in both hands. "When you would not even try to help him. Go away, Wihio."

Wihio shrugged and went. "Silky" Bill McGregor picked up the chunk of rock, keeping one eye on the Cheyenne who pitched it down. The withered old man didn't look like he could squash a bug, but the buck at his side, all done up in red paint and feathers, was another story. McGregor couldn't figure out why no one was making a ruckus about the pair of them standing bold-as-you-please in the middle of Fort Summner's only street with spears in their hands and bows on their backs. But nobody did. The morning traffic on foot, horse and wagon just clumped and rattled around them. Folks sneered or they whispered, but nobody asked nobody's business. Nobody ran for the soldiers or the sheriff. Which didn't make sense.

McGregor turned the rock over in his long fingers. The hazy summer sun picked out the glittering flecks of silver embedded in its brownish surface. Although McGregor made his living at cards, he had some experience with raw ore. To his eye, this rock had come from what could be a valuable hunk of ground.

"Where'd you say you found this?" He cocked his eyebrows.

"We will show you the place." The old man had a voice as dry as dust. "Fallen Star," he tapped his own chest. "He will guide you, but first you must help the People. One of our braves has summoned your Devil. We want you to send it away."

McGregor's first impulse was to bust out laughing, but being stared at by the old red was like being stared at by the mountains, and the mountains thought this was too big to be laughed at.

"Tall order." McGregor tugged at the brim of his hat. "You'd be better off seeing the preacher for something like that." He jerked his chin toward the tent church.

The old man shook his head. "The preacher will not listen to us. The soldiers will not listen to us. Your Devil is a dark and bloody mystery, white man. I do not understand him. We need a white man to send him away. We do not have a holy man, we do not have a brave. We must get a trickster."

"Well, now." McGregor tucked the rock into his jacket pocket. "I'll have to think about it."

Fallen Star nodded. "When you've made up your mind, meet us on the northern edge of town. Long Nose, come." The brave and the old man turned and walked slowly down the street. The folks passing by steered wide of them, but still, nobody said anything.

"Never thought I'd see Silky Bill McGregor stoop to talk to a couple of whiskey-soaked reds." Ned Carter laughed at him from the door of the Royale Saloon until his belly shook. Ned and Bill had been partnering around together for years, flush and broke, and Bill'd never figured out how Ned managed to stay so fat.

"Whisky-soaked ain't what I'd call 'em." McGregor remembered the old man's eyes. Crazy as a possum at noon, maybe, but he was stone-cold sober.

Ned was staring at him now. "What're you talking about? Neither of 'em could stand up straight. What were they after?"

"I don't know," Bill said absently. His head was still working on how he and Ned, and apparently the rest of the town, could have seen such a different set of reds. His throat started itching and he realized he wanted a drink.

Ned ambled over and slapped him on the shoulder. "Well, I do

know. They was after money, or whiskey. And I know something else. Jamie Raeburn's gettin' up a game tonight and if we're real polite, you and me might finagle ourselves a couple of seats." He winked.

"You go on, Ned. I got some thinking to do."

Ned shrugged and took himself back indoors. McGregor strolled away down the hard-packed dirt street, dodging a couple of drovers on horses and sidestepping a load of workmen with tool bags. The town outside Fort Summner was just a touch over three years old, and its canvas shanties were just beginning to be replaced by board and shingle buildings that looked like they might actually last awhile. People were filling the place up, coming in and out of the store and the stable almost as much as they were coming in and out of the three saloons.

And not one of them had said a word about two armed reds in the middle of town offering a silver mine to a gambler. The idea gave Bill a queasy feeling.

Past the assayer's stood the Nugget, a saloon so new they'd barely finished pegging the door together. The bar was a couple of planks balanced on a pair of empty kegs. McGregor ordered himself a whiskey and surveyed the room. A couple of boys shared redeye and cigarettes in one corner. A three-handed poker game played itself out in another. Along the far wall, Dennis DeArmant, the skinny owner of the place, dealt a faro game across a rickety table.

Bill's hands twitched. If poker was Ned's game, faro was his. He felt in his pocket for a couple of five dollar pieces. Might as well teach these suckers how a man played it. It'd help take his mind off those Cheyenne anyway.

"Mr. McGregor?" said a cultured voice behind him.

Bill turned, taking his hand out of his pocket, in case he needed it for something else. The owner of the voice was a narrow man in a dark suit that had been cut to fit. His waistcoat was as silky and brightly patterned as Bill's own, and a gold toothpick dangled from the watch chain. What struck Bill, though, were his eyes. They were black, solid black.

Recognizing a gentleman when he saw one, Bill quickly pulled together his professional manners. "May I ask who you are, sir?"

The stranger gave a short chuckle. "Just an associate, Mr. McGregor. We've played cards together a few times." Bill racked his brains trying to recall where he could've seen those eyes before and came up with nothing. "May I buy you a drink?" asked the stranger.

McGregor glanced at the faro game and then at the stranger. He shrugged. "All right."

The stranger collected a bottle and two glasses from the barkeep, gesturing with them toward one of the back tables.

"Still don't know who I am, do you Bill?" He said as he poured.

"No, sir, that I don't." Bill raised his glass.

The stranger smiled over the rim of his glass. It was a thin smile, like the curve in a butcher's knife. "Round here folks mostly call me Nick Scratch."

Bill set his own drink back on the table and got to his feet. "I don't care for your jokes, sir," he announced. Across the room, heads turned and chatter dropped away. Boots and chairs scraped across the floorboards.

"Sit down, McGregor," said the stranger. Bill sat.

"Drink your drink."

Bill lifted the glass and knocked back the whiskey. The other customers' attention went back to their own business. Bill set the glass on the table top. He drew his hand away and watched it shaking. He felt nothing, nothing at all.

"Are you ready to listen to me, Bill?" said the Devil.

"Have I got a choice?" McGregor couldn't get his gaze to leave the table top.

"Course you do. But your life'll be easier if you sit there calmly and let me finish. I've no wish to see you come to harm, Bill." McGregor heard the Devil pour himself another shot. "You're one of my best men."

That got McGregor's chin to jerk itself up.

"Oh, yes, you work for me, Bill." A red light sparkled deep down in the Devil's black eyes. "And I got a nice spot in Hell saved for your soul. Right next to the stove, so you won't take a chill.

"See, wherever you go, the good churchgoing folk denounce you, using my name. But the young folks see you thriving by it and they line up for a chance to follow your way of life. Some of them do as fine a job for me as you do. Some do much better.

"How many times has somebody said, you've got the Devil's own luck, Bill? It happens to be true. I've seen to it that you prosper and I'll see that you continue to do so, just so long as you stay away from those Cheyenne. I've a bargain to keep with them and I'm a man of my word." The light in the Devil's eyes snapped. "I've got to go, Bill, but I'll leave you with this, just in case you're inclined to believe I crawled out of that whiskey bottle. A riot's going to start tonight in the Royale House. Before sunup, three-quarters of the town'll be burnt down and Ned Carter will be dead behind the Summner House Hotel. Shot in the back."

The Devil walked out of the saloon. McGregor, with his hands still trembling, poured another whiskey, but then all he did was look at it. Minutes ticked themselves away to the click of coins on the faro table.

Bill didn't believe in haunts or spiritualism. He tried hard not to believe what his father had preached in the Boston parish he'd ruled with such an iron fist. But he believed his eyes and his head. He'd stayed alive believing those.

Right now, his eyes and his head told him what was going on here was past all understanding. If a man couldn't understand the rules of the game, it was best he leave the table. Bill pulled himself to his feet and left the whiskey and the saloon as fast as he could. Outside the door, he chucked the piece of silver ore into a patch of weeds. Then he made tracks for the Royale.

He found Ned in one of the bare rooms on the second floor, getting in a few sociable hands before Jamie Raeburn's big game. McGregor waited impatiently for the hand to play itself out before he sidled up to Ned, who was raking in the pot.

"I'd like a word with you in private, Ned, if I may," he said into his friend's ear.

"Keep my seat for me, gentlemen," said Ned instantly. He got up and followed McGregor out onto the porch. "What's the matter, Bill?"

McGregor faced him. A fresh sweat that had nothing to do with the heat of the day prickled under his collar. "Ned, I've had word there's going to be trouble tonight."

"What kind of trouble?" Ned hitched up his eyebrows.

McGregor's memory showed him the Devil's black eyes, and the sweat broke under his hat brim as well. "Just trust me on this one, Ned. We need to get back East, fast."

Ned searched his face for a long moment. "OK, Bill, but I'll need to work up some cash."

"Me too. What do you say we meet out here at 5 sharp? We can get horses and gear from the blacksmith and get out while there's still some light."

Ned consulted his pocket watch. "Not much time, but," he grinned, "there's a couple of boys in there, fresh out of the mines. Five it is."

The two gamblers parted ways at the door. Ned stalked over to the poker table and Bill to the faro games.

McGregor always played to win, but there were a few times, like now, when he played to win quickly. Years of practice let him set everything aside but the game. Part of his mind ticked off the cards

as they were played. Part of it calculated the possible order of the ones remaining in the spring-loaded box. He split his bets between cards. He bet which cards would lose as well as which would win. Carefully, he bet on the order of the last three cards to be drawn from the box and won at four to one odds.

By the time the railroad clock chimed the hour of 5, McGregor had taken in enough to make the dealer sweat, but not quite enough to break the bank. He took up his gold and script and met Ned outside.

Ned patted his money belt. "Got enough here that we can head back East in style." He glanced around at the mud and bare-board town. "Soon as we get some place that knows what style is."

McGregor shared his laugh half-heartedly. "Ned, you get down to the forge. I'll settle up at the Summner House and meet you there."

"All right, Silky." Ned started up the street.

"At the forge," repeated McGregor.

Ned frowned. "I heard you, Bill."

McGregor left him reluctantly and made tracks for the Summner House. Ned, like McGregor, traveled light. Once in their room, it didn't take him long to load both of their belongings into their cases. He snapped the latch closed on Ned's grip and hoisted their bags off the bed. He turned, only to find old Fallen Star sitting cross-legged in the doorway.

The bags thudded to the floor. "How the hell'd you get in here!"

"I walked." He took a puff from the pipe he carried.

"They'd never let a red in here!" McGregor took a step back, hand reaching for his revolver.

"No one saw me." Fallen Star blew a cloud of smoke at the ceiling.

"Then how'd you get across the lobby?"

"I walked."

McGregor set his jaw. "Then you can walk on out of here. You're in my way."

"McGregor."

For the second time that day, the sound of his own name paralyzed him. "Running away will do you no good," the old man said. "You must fight your Devil or he will plague you forever."

"He's not my Devil!" snapped Bill.

"Then whose is he?" Unbending one joint at a time, Fallen Star stood. "Gambler, you want to save your friend. I want to save my son, Standing-in-the-West. You call your Devil here and work against him with the white man's understanding. I will strengthen you with the red man's medicine. Maybe together we can beat him."

McGregor remembered the Devil's eyes and found the nerve to move again. He pulled his gun out of its holster. "Get out of my way or I'll blow a hole clear through you."

Fallen Star shook his head heavily and took a long drag on his pipe. "That you may see the truth." He blew a rank cloud of smoke into McGregor's face.

By the time Bill quit coughing, the old man was gone. McGregor didn't stop to ask himself where or how. He just gathered up the bags and toted them down the stairs.

He was passing his money across the pigeonholed desk to the hotel owner when the first shot split the air.

McGregor dove for the floor. The hotel owner was already down behind the desk. On hands and knees, the gambler crawled to the door and eased it open.

Men spilled out of the Royale, guns in their hands. The thunder and lightning of revolver shots rang through the air. A stranger sprawled face down in the mud. Another hollered wordlessly and took his own shot. The crowd spread out. So did the gunfire.

All at once, the storm hit the Denver House. McGregor scrambled sideways as somebody kicked the door in. Men shoved and stumbled inside, yelling over the top of each other. Somebody shattered a pane of glass with the butt of his revolver. Some fool waved his gun toward the owner. A shot and the stench of gunpowder exploded from behind Bill, and blood burst across the fool's chest. All heads turned to see the Summner House's owner with his Winchester raised. He couldn't keep them all covered though, and the fool had a friend. Another gun barked and the landlord hit the back wall on top of most of his brains.

STANDING-IN-THE-WEST AIMED HIS GUN at the old man. "Is your medicine strong enough to stop my bullet, Fallen Star? Or do you use too much of it to keep the riot away from you? The white men will leave our land!"



McGregor eased his revolver into his hand and slid out the door. Wood smoke and a roaring on the wind competed with the smell and noise of gunfire. The heat hit him a second later and Bill looked up. More heat seared his face. The Royale was on fire. Men and women leapt shrieking from the windows.

In the middle of the chaos stood the Devil, thumbs tucked into his waistcoat pockets and a grin spread across his face. No one paid him any heed. A naked woman jumped from the Royale's second story and landed in the street, her body bent and broken. No one stopped to help her. A hunk of burning wood landed on the roof of the assayer's. Flames and sparks wriggled to the sky. A few folk turned out with water buckets, but most scattered, trying to get out of the way. Men with rifles appeared on rooftops. A couple of blue-coated soldiers galloped in on horseback, raising clouds of dust and shouting orders to no one at all.

The Devil laughed.

Something in McGregor snapped. Without thinking, he was running to the spot where Nick Scratch stood.

"Stop this!" he hollered, grabbing Scratch by the shoulder.

The Devil turned and looked at him with eyes more red than black. "I'm going to forgive you this, McGregor, because you don't know what you're doing." Pain bit hard into the gambler's hand. Bill jerked backwards.

The screams got louder. Fire laid its claim to the Nugget with DeArmant still shooting through the window. McGregor thought about Ned and saw the woman lying dead in the dirt.

"What'll it take to get you to stop this?" he cried.

"Go away, Bill."

All McGregor's desperation melted into panic. Before he had time to realize it must be Scratch working on him again, he backed up two steps, turned, and ran for his life.

Bent almost double, Bill raced up the street. Bullets and screams whizzed past him. He hugged board walls and dove through open spaces, returning fire when he needed to clear his way, and not stopping to see if he had hit anything or not.

At last from the shelter of a clapboard shack, McGregor could spy the open-frame building that housed the forge. Horses reared and hauled on the reins that tethered them to the rail beside it. McGregor ducked his head from side to side, trying to see Ned between the thrashing animals.

A man's shadow crept around the forge. With a quick knife, he slit the horse's reins, setting them free to gallop out of town. Then the shadow climbed to the roof of the forge as easily as a cat. He pulled a rifle from a sling on his back and took aim.

He fired. McGregor saw DeArmant knocked off his feet. The shadow fired again and a nameless man on another rooftop toppled over.

"Standing-in-the-West!"

Bill blinked and knuckled his eyes. Fallen Star stood beside the forge, right in the shadow man's line of fire. His gnarled arms were raised toward the heavens. The pipe still burned in his hand.

Standing-in-the-West held his fire. "Out of my way!"

"You will not win the war with the white men this way!" Fallen Star's voice carried clearly over the rage of men and gunshots and fire. Bill shook his head hard. He knew the old man spoke Cheyenne, but he could understand him clearly. "You only make a slave of

yourself to your anger and their Devil! Will you fight and die as a slave or a free man?"

Standing-in-the-West aimed his gun at the old man. "Is your medicine strong enough to stop my bullet, Fallen Star? Or do you use too much of it to keep the riot away from you? The white men will leave our land!"

"Our land!" retorted Fallen Star. "We do not own this place! It is not a dog or a slave! You talk like the white men!"

"And I will kill you with their gun if you do not leave me now!"

Fallen Star dropped his hands. "I would have wished another kind of trail for you, my son," he said. And despite the noise of fire and riot, Bill heard Standing-in-the-West cock the rifle's hammer.

Fallen Star walked away to the edge of town. Standing-in-the-West took fresh aim toward the center of the riot and fired again. Another man fell. Shots buzzed toward the Cheyenne. None found its mark.

McGregor's stomach knotted up. He dropped his gaze to search the forge. Ned was nowhere in sight. Bill turned to run back.

Reality became a blur of noise and fading color as he stumbled toward the Summner House. Something heavy caught the toes of his boots and Bill measured his length in the dust. He came up, spitting and swearing, looked at what tripped him up and saw Ned.

What was left of Ned's blood oozed out of the bullet hole in his back. McGregor's strength gave out and he sat down hard next to his friend's body, unable to think, let alone move. Vaguely, slowly, he noticed that Ned's money belt was still around his waist and that his hand clutched some leather strips. McGregor touched them. Horses' reins. He thought of Standing-in-the-West's knife and his fist bunched up and pressed against his forehead.

"See the great gambler sitting in the dirt!" cried a voice.

McGregor looked up. The world had receded silently into a solid curtain of fog. The only things left were Ned's corpse and a one-handed red man with a huge nose and wrinkled skin. His eyes glittered brightly under a sagging hat hung with strings of feathers and animal tails.

"Who?" Bill heard his voice without feeling his mouth move.

"Many." The man smiled. "Napi," and he was a half-naked Indian brave. "Nana Boshio," and he was a scrawny scavenger with three legs. "But for you, I'm Wihio," and the one-handed man was back. "Come with me."

McGregor was on his feet without standing. He followed wrinkled Wihio without walking. "I'm dreaming."

"So you are," grinned Wihio. He pointed with the stump of his wrist. "Look that way. You will learn something."

McGregor saw Standing-in-the-West sitting naked in a dark lodge full of smoke, or maybe steam. His skin was slick with sweat. His eyes were shut tight and he called out.

"Medicine Arrows! Arrows, I know you were captured from us long ago, but I know that you have helped the People many times even from afar! Medicine Arrows, help me now! Help me kill these white men so that no more may come to harm us!"

A voice from nowhere answered him. "We cannot help you kill the white men. Guns and horses have made us weak and scattered us. Go out to the People, Standing-in-the-West. Look for ways to live, not to kill. Maybe then we can help you."

Standing-in-the-West called out. "Wihio! Wihio! You are strong in

tricks and mischief! Help me work mischief on these white men!"

Wihio spoke. "I cannot help you work mischief on these white men. They thrive on challenge and danger. Go out to the People, Standing-in-the-West. Look for ways to strengthen yourselves, not weaken others. Maybe then I can help you."

The world shifted. Now Standing-in-the-West waited on a hillside where autumn's colors touched the trees. His knife drew a five-pointed star on the ground. A cross hung upside down from a baby cottonwood's branch. Standing-in-the-West stepped away from the star and methodically recited the Lord's Prayer, backwards.

The Devil stood in the center of the star.

Standing-in-the-West spoke. "I want to make a treaty with you, Devil, to drive the white men off of Cheyenne land."

"Why should I do that?" The Devil spread his hands.

"I will give you my soul."

"You do not believe in souls, Standing-in-the-West. They are outside of what the Cheyenne know to be true."

Standing-in-the-West shrugged. "I am a Christian now. I know what a soul is. I will make a treaty with you."

The Devil smiled his thin smile. "Very well, Standing-in-the-West. We have a treaty."

"What are you doing here!" cried Wihio.

The Devil turned his head, but Standing-in-the-West didn't move. "I am taking his soul, Wihio."

Wihio reared up, suddenly as big as a mountain. "Go!" His voice rocked the entire world. "By the Great Spirit that birthed me and the land that strengthens me! Go, Foul One! You have nothing to do with the People!"

The Devil stood his ground. "I do now."

Wihio dwindled to a man's size again. The mists swallowed up everything but him and McGregor.

"White man, I do not understand your people. I do understand that your Devil is strong in corruption and Standing-in-the-West has brought that corruption onto the People. He will use Standing-in-the-West and he will make the People his own. I will not have that, gambler. The People are my people, not his."

"He is your luck, Bill McGregor, but I am a gambler too. If you rid the People of your Devil, I will take his place as your luck."

"You can hold it right there!" McGregor exploded. "You people! Do this! Do that! You're a white man! You're greedy! Here, we'll pay you to risk your life...your soul for us!" He threw up both hands. "Damn you all! This is your problem! What are you and that medicine man risking!"

Wihio didn't even blink. "That is fair, gambler. All right. I too will risk something." He tore one of the tails off his hat and it was in McGregor's closed hand. "I will be beside you when you face the Devil. I will do what you say, even if you say I should kill or die. I will tell Fallen Star he must do the same. Is that enough for you?"

McGregor's fists tightened up. He could see Ned's body again. He drank in the details of it for a long, long time.

"Wihio." His tongue felt thick and heavy. "If I do this, will you make Standing-in-the-West's life rough on him?"

Wihio smiled and his teeth flashed like stars. "Gambler, I will make his life impossible for him."

"All right then," Bill whispered.

Bill woke up. He hadn't moved but he must have been there for hours. Night had fallen and the town had gone silent. The smell of burnt wood filled the wind. McGregor stretched his aching neck and saw down drawing a thin white line around the deserted forge.

He stared down at the coyote's tail wound between his fingers.

"All right," he said again.

Slowly, he forced his mind back over all the events of the day and added to them all the things he remembered hearing from his father's sermons. Something that would be called a plan by a more generous man took shape inside him.

He folded the mangy tail up and put it in his pocket. Then, he turned Ned gently onto his back. Silky Bill closed his friend's eyes and folded his hands.

"If I make it," Bill eased Ned's money belt off. "This'll buy you the

finest funeral this territory's ever seen."

McGregor straightened up his creaking legs and headed for the north edge of town.

The morning chill had soaked well into him by the time he made it out onto the prairie grass. Fallen Star, his boy Long Nose, and three painted Indian ponies appeared from out of a cluster of cottonwoods to meet him. Bill found he was long past being surprised by so minor a miracle of timing.

"Wihio has told me what your answer is," said Fallen Star. "What must we do first?"

"I could use something to eat," McGregor croaked. "Then you'd better show me where Standing-in-the-West called up the Devil."

Stone gave him water and dried buffalo meat. What Bill really wanted was whiskey, but he didn't feel up to heading back to whatever was left of the town to fetch any.

Fallen Star led the silent procession of men and horses until the sun was almost directly overhead. The wind stiffened up to blow all the summer heat down on top of them. The ponies trooped steadily through the grass and pale-leaved trees until they reached the gentle slope McGregor had seen in Wihio's strange dream.

Bill dismounted along with the two reds and marshaled his courage. "I'm telling you now, I don't know what I'm doing. I just got a couple of ideas." His voice was holding steady, even if his heart wasn't. "I'm going to try to get the Devil into a card game. I'll need something to bet with, and his coin is people. I'll need something I can use as chips so I can bet you. Both of you."

Fallen Star did not hesitate. He handed over his long-stemmed pipe. McGregor turned to the brave. Long Nose gave him his necklace of red beads.

"You know I got a good chance of losing," McGregor tucked the tokens into his coat pockets.

"We know," said Fallen Star. "We also know you are going to do your best. You are now on a war trail."

McGregor turned his back to the reds. He wondered if Fallen Star would have said the same thing if he knew all that Bill's sketchy plan entailed. Bill brought up the memory of Ned's corpse and of Standing-in-the-West on the rooftop. He squared his shoulders.

"Nick Scratch!" he called into the wind. "I've got some business with you!"

The thin stranger stood in front of him, fire glowing hot behind his black eyes.

"I tried to warn you, Bill." The Devil shook his head.

"I'm not saying you didn't." McGregor tightened all the fibers in his wrists to keep his hands from shaking. The air had gone warm and thick around him. His ears felt stopped up and his heart beat slow and sluggish.

"You can still go, Bill," the Devil breathed to him. "No hard feelings. Go on."

Bill teetered. "I'm not leaving, just yet."

"Neither am I," the Devil replied evenly.

"Care to bet on that?"

A hot wind blew hard and sudden. McGregor clamped his hand on his hat and clenched his teeth. The Devil remained silent, watching him.

"I'll play you a game of faro," McGregor said. "'Til one of us is cleaned out. If I win, you clear out and never come near anyone here or their land or their family again."

The Devil arched his delicate eyebrows. "And what do you have to put up in such a game, Bill?"

"How about them?" McGregor nodded toward the unmoving Cheyenne.

The Devil fingered his chin. "Mmmm. Fallen Star, now he would be a prize. They all you got?"

McGregor's hand curled around the scrap of fur in his pocket. "No."

"Well, well. All right, then." The Devil nodded. "I haven't much time though, Bill. One game, 'til one of us is cleaned out. I'll deal."

Nick Scratch didn't even blink but the faro table from the Nugget appeared in the waving grass between him and Bill. At his left hand stood the owner of the Denver House, with his eyes wide and his

NICK SCRATCH didn't even blink but the faro table from the Nugget appeared between him and Bill. At his left hand stood the owner of the Denver House, with his eyes wide and his skull split open where the bullet passed through him.



skull split open where the bullet passed through him.

"My casekeeper," Nick Scratch gestured a fine hand at the dead man and the abacus that kept track of the cards played.

"Strange," said Wihio's voice in his head and Bill jumped halfway out of his skin. "I was expecting Standing-in-the-West. Why has he not claimed him yet?" Wihio paused, and it seemed to Bill the invisible presence was watching him shudder. "Well, gambler, don't tell me you are afraid of shadows and voices."

The Devil's eyes sparkled. "Wihio? You here? Which of these fools is your champion, Dog-of-a-Mystery?"

The laughter left Wihio's voice. "You have secrets behind your fire and when I learn them, you will need to look to your skin."

The Devil's eyes glowed red. "Oh, yes. I will look to my skin. See that you do the same when I have the People for my own."

"Let's get to it." Bill plunked himself down in the chair that had appeared on his side of the table and tried to settle his mind on the game. It was just a faro game. He knew this game like the back of his hand. He could play this. Didn't matter who was dealing. He took out the beads and the pipe. In his hand they turned to a pile of five dollar coins. Bill set them down on the table like they might bite. Just a faro game. And he was feeling lucky today. That shook him, but he felt Wihio hovering around back of him and the tension eased. Yes. He was feeling lucky today.

For the look of the thing, Bill inspected the box and the cards. Both were clean, which he hadn't expected. The cards flashed between the Devil's fingers as he shuffled. He tamped the deck even against the table and laid it neatly into the box. The wind blew the unnatural heat through the coarse grass around McGregor's ankles but didn't come near the top of the table.

The Devil turned the crank on the box and drew out the four of spades. That was the soda, the card turned up in the dealing box before play starts, and it took no part in the game. The ghoulish casekeeper pushed a bead across on the abacus to count it as drawn. Bill's eyes started watering.

The world changed. McGregor still faced the Devil across the faro table, but around them hunched the skin mounds of a Cheyenne camp.

"What're you doing?" Bill's voice came out in a whisper.

In this new place it was barely dawn. A river chattered to itself somewhere in the distance. The only people up and about were Long Nose and Fallen Star. Long Nose prowled between the lodges, clutching his feathered spear. Fallen Star looked across to Bill with his deep eyes and then he began to chant. It was a slow, strong sound and it made the hairs on the back of Bill's neck prickle.

"Playing the game," replied the Devil. "Place your bet, Bill."

"Charge!" bellowed somebody.

Horses' hooves pounded the ground until it shuddered. Dawn light flashed on sabers and rifle barrels and gold braid. Long Nose hollered in Cheyenne and no one answered. The cavalry bore down on the camp. Shots split the dawn. Long Nose dodged, dragging Fallen Star with him. Someone screamed. A soldier leapt off his horse and slit a skin house open.

Blood. Blood everywhere. Bill gripped the edge of the table and stared at the game. He felt the heat of the Devil's grin. Long Nose lifted his spear and charged into the fray. Fallen Star did not move, but the world around him did. Soldiers who had clear shots at Long

Nose missed by a mile. They fell from their horses for him to cut down. They swung their sabers over his head and got in each other's way. Fought like a bunch of kids bogged down in the snow. Long Nose killed them and they killed the women and the children and the unarmed men and Bill sat and looked on.

Stop this, Bill, stop it now! cried a part of Bill's mind. *You already got him where you want him, and if it's going to work, it's going to work as well now as later.*

Bill steeled himself. Not yet.

"Place your bet, gambler," said Wihio. Bill glanced behind him. The three-legged coyote sat beside him. It dipped its muzzle and Bill felt his mind clear. He heard the shouts and hoofbeats and he smelled blood and gunpowder, but it was all a long way away. Right now he had a game to play. He set his coins down, splitting the bet carefully.

The Devil gave a loud guffaw. "Him? This is your champion, Wihio? Phew! Dog-of-a-Mystery, you must be desperate!"

The coyote bared its teeth. "I may be all you say, Foul One, but at least I understand my own people."

Still chuckling, the Devil turned the crank on the box and the game really began.

It didn't take long for Bill's little pile of chips to slide away. His splits didn't work and he couldn't keep count. He felt Wihio keeping himself between Bill and his fears, but it wasn't enough. Maybe Wihio was too busy keeping him from going raving mad to loan him any extra luck. Maybe he didn't understand this white man's game. Maybe it was just that Bill knew the Devil had always made him lucky and now his luck was dealing the cards against him.

Around them the fighting kept on. Bill, using the calm Wihio loaned him flickered his eyes toward the soldiers, searching for one face in particular.

He's got to do it, he told himself. He's cruelty itself. If he's got Ned's soul, he'll pull him out of Hell and parade him for me. If he doesn't then...then things in Heaven are looser than Father ever knew, and we all can still get outta this OK. If I've got things figured right that is. Bill glanced down at Wihio and the coyote just shrugged. Well, he'd already laid everything he had on Bill, what was he going to do?

The cards flitted from the box and the coins clinked together into higher piles in front of the Devil. One shot found its mark. Long Nose dropped into the grass. A soldier laughed. McGregor laid another bet. The Devil turned the crank on the case. There was a sound like ripe fruit falling and a soldier raised a sword dripping with Fallen Star's blood.

The battle fell silent; even the sound of the river fell away.

"That seems to be that, Bill," said Nick Scratch. He nodded, friendlylike, to the cavalry sergeant.

Bill glanced at Wihio. "He's a hasty one, isn't he?" said Wihio.

"Patience is a virtue," said Bill from behind the blanket of calm Wihio kept around him. "He's real short on virtue."

"You don't say, gambler? And why hasn't he got Standing-in-the-West, yet? Can you tell me that?" asked Wihio.

Bill scratched his chin. "I'd say it's 'cause he ain't kept his side of the bargain yet."

"White men're still here, aren't they?" Wihio asked.

"Oh, is that the way it works?" asked Bill. Wihio nodded. "I see."

Thunder rumbled from underground. "You've got another bet,

Bill, I see it in you. Put it down or walk away," the Devil said.

"Go ahead, gambler," said Wihio.

Bill scanned the battlefield and saw nothing but strangers' faces among the dead. He swallowed hard, drew out the coyote's tail and laid it on the king.

The Devil grinned from ear to ear. "And I thought you at least had brains, Wihio."

He drew out a fresh card. The nine of spades. With one fine hand he picked up the tail.

"Now, Dog," the Devil said. "Heel!"

Wihio whimpered and limped to the Devil's side, his tail tucked between his legs.

Without the shelter Wihio gave him, the world slammed against McGregor. The steel taste of blood filled his mouth, and all around him lay the victims of the battle; the dead and the worse than dead who could still scream. This was no dream. This was smoke and stench and heat and fear. Waves of it. Billows of it, surrounding Bill, pressing him down, drowning him. This was the riot in Fort Sumner. This was how the Devil kept his bargain and how he'd serve his new people.

"You've lost, Bill." Heat flickered through the Devil's voice.

"N...ot yet," stammered Bill. "I've got one more bet."

"Now what could you possibly have left to lay on this table, Bill?"

The Devil kicked Wihio sharply. The coyote yelped and cowered. "You've bet the soul of a whole people and lost it."

"My life," Bill replied.

The Devil actually looked startled.

McGregor drew out his revolver. "I'm a preacher's son, Devil. I know this much. You may have a spot in Hell for my soul, but as long as I'm alive, I could still go straight and save myself and work on savin' those young folks you talked about. But if I lose this turn, I'm your boy, before and after I die." He took the gun by the barrel and held the hilt toward the Devil.

"Bill McGregor, you've got fewer brains than Wihio."

"Silky."

Bill swung around. Ned stood behind him, blood oozing out of his chest and spilling onto his hands. "Silky," he coughed. "He's put me up against your life. Hurry, Bill. I...it hurts."

"Oh, my" Bill felt all the life drain out of his cheeks. "Ned, I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Ned stretched out his hands. He was white like snow, like death. His round face had already fallen into lines and angles. "Hurry, Bill. Get me out of this. Place your bet."

"No," said Bill.

"Then I win," said the Devil.

"Bill!" shouted Ned.

Bill forced himself to turn away from his friend. "Then take your winnings and go," he clutched the gun barrel. "If you can. The way I see it, the game's not over yet. And it won't be until I've laid my last bet."

"Bill!" Ned was screaming.

Bill heard him fall. He closed his eyes and prayed with all his heart and soul that he had it right. This was the real gamble, not the way the cards came out of the box. Bill gambled everything on his guess at the reason why the Devil had to wait to take Standing-in-the-West, on why he didn't just reach across the table and snatch Bill's soul from his body. "I'm not cleaned out yet, Devil. And 'til I am, the game's not over." Bill held the edge of the table to keep himself upright as he felt his knees begin to buckle. "If the game's not over, you have to stay here." That had to be it, it had to be. The Devil couldn't leave an unfulfilled contract behind him. "That's the deal. And you," Bill added bitterly, "are a man of your word."

The Devil's howl tore the world apart. McGregor's heart stopped dead and then banged like a hammer against his ribs. He knees gave out, toppling him onto the ground. Ned lay there next to him. Ned who had all the guts of the pair of them. Ned was bleeding and crying. Crying like a baby.

Bill shouted to drown the crying out. "You cannot leave!" McGregor raised his head and saw all the fires of Hell raging in the Devil's

eyes and knew he'd guessed right. Triumph rang through him. "You got a deal with me to play until one of us is cleaned out! You cannot do anything else, ever, until I lay my bet down! And I will not do it until we have a bargain."

"You don't have the will, McGregor!" The blast from the shout bowled the gambler backwards.

Painfully, Bill hauled himself back onto his knees. "Want to bet?"

The Devil swept his fist through the air.

Everything vanished. There was not even a mist. McGregor smelled nothing, heard nothing, had no ground beneath him. He had only his eyes, and all he saw was the Devil.

"I will leave the Cheyenne alone," growled Nick Scratch.

Bill could not move any part of himself but he could speak as he had in the dream Wihio led him through. "That's a start."

The Devil's eyes turned blood red. "I will return the lives you bet on the faro table and I will touch them and theirs no more."

"Not enough."

"Gambler," the word filled the universe. "What do you want?"

"Ned Carter's soul," said Bill. "And mine."

The Devil's face twisted. His mouth worked itself back and forth. At last he said, "I have not had your soul since you tried to stop the riot in Fort Sumner."

A warmth that had nothing to do with the Devil's heat spread through McGregor. "I want this notarized."

The Devil bared his teeth. "You had better tread very carefully the rest of your days, McGregor."

Wihio stood beside the Devil now, hat and all. "Wihio," said Nick Scratch. "If I break my treaty with Bill McGregor, you may hand me over to the Master of Heaven." Each word sounded like a branch snapping in the fire.

"It is well, Foul One." Wihio bobbed his head and smiled.

The world dropped back into place in a rush of burning wind and bright sunshine. Bill looked at the table, calculated the state of play, and set his gun down on the eight card.

He didn't even see the game vanish. His posterior hit the ground, jarring all the breath out of him. For a moment, Bill blinked stupidly up at the cloudless sky.

A wrinkled hand reached into his line of vision. Bill let Fallen Star help him to his feet.

"Thank you," said Bill, running his hand through his hair. Long Nose handed him his hat. He nodded to the silent brave.

"We thank you, gambler," Fallen Star said. Sunlight caught a spark deep in the medicine man's eyes as he said, "Now I would ask you to please leave this place."

"What?" Bill pushed his hat down and holstered his gun. "After all that? How about that land you promised me?"

Fallen Star sighed. "I will take you to where we found the stone, if that is what you wish, but hear what I say first.

"Our people take the war trail against each other. Your people have too much hunger for things which are not yours, and we have too many young men like Standing-in-the-West.

"You have done us a great service. I do not want to hear that one of my braves has taken your life."

Bill dug his hands into his pockets. A scrap of fur brushed his palm and Wihio's mocking presence brushed his mind.

He sighed. "Just as well, I suppose. I'd just about made up my mind to go straight anyways." He held the coyote tail out to the medicine man.

"To keep away your Devil?" Fallen Star accepted the token.

McGregor shook his head. "No. To get him good and mad." He cracked a smile. "It's the only revenge I'm likely to get on him for letting Ned die." He dug his hands into his pockets. In a strange way, he actually had lost his life on that faro table. Only he hadn't lost it to the Devil. Bill glanced at the clear, blue sky. Well, his father'd be pleased anyway.

Fallen Star raised his hand and the wind blew gently around them. "May you have a bright sun and blue sky for your journey, gambler."

McGregor raised his hand in return. Then he set his back to the prairie and started walking. ♣

THEY PULLED UP MOST OF THE RAILWAY tracks in the early sixties, when I was three or four. They slashed the train services to ribbons. This meant that there was nowhere to go but London, and the little town where I lived became the end of the line.

My earliest reliable memory: eighteen months old, my mother away in the hospital having my sister, and my grandmother walking with me down to a bridge and lift-

TROLL BRIDGE

Lots of fearsome things lurk under bridges and other dark places. But many more can be found much closer to home.

BY NEIL GAIMAN

Illustration by Gary Lippincott

ing me up to watch the train below, panting and steaming like a black iron dragon.

Over the next few years they lost the last of the steam trains, and with them went the network of railways that joined village to village, town to town. I didn't know that the trains were going. By the time I was seven they were a thing of the past.

We lived in an old house on the outskirts of the town. The fields opposite were empty and fallow. I used to climb the fence and lie in the shade of a small bulrush patch and read; or if I were feeling more adventurous I'd explore the grounds of the empty manor beyond the fields. It had a weed-clogged ornamental pond, with a low wooden bridge over it. I never saw any groundsmen or caretakers in my forays through the gardens and woods, and I never attempted to enter the manor. That would have been courting disaster, and, besides, it was a matter of faith for me that all empty old houses were haunted.

It is not that I was credulous, simply that I believed in all things dark and dangerous. It was part of my young creed that the night was full of ghosts and witches, hungry and flapping and dressed completely in black.

The converse held reassuringly true: daylight was safe. Daylight was always safe.

A ritual: on the last day of summer term, walking home from school, I would remove my shoes and socks and, carrying them in my hands, walk down the stony, flinty lane on pink and tender feet. During the summer holiday I would only put shoes on under duress. I would revel in my freedom from footwear until the school term began once more in September.

When I was seven I discovered the path through the



wood. It was summer, hot and bright, and I wandered a long way from home that day.

I was exploring. I went past the manor, its windows boarded up and blind, across the grounds, and through some unfamiliar woods. I scrambled down a steep bank and found myself on a shady path that was new to me and overgrown with trees; the light that penetrated the leaves was stained green and gold, and I thought I was in fairyland.

A stream trickled down the side of the path, teeming with tiny, transparent shrimps. I picked them up and watched them jerk and spin on my fingertips. Then I put them back.

I wandered down the path. It was perfectly straight, and overgrown with short grass. From time to time I would find these really terrific rocks: bubbly, melted things, brown and purple and black. If you held them up to the light you could see every color of the rainbow. I was convinced that they had to be extremely valuable, and stuffed my pockets with them.



E WAS HUGE. His head brushed the top of the brick arch. He was more or less translucent: I could see the bricks and trees behind him, dimmed but not lost. He was all my nightmares given flesh. He had huge, strong teeth, and rending claws, and strong, hairy hands.

I walked and walked down the quiet, golden-green corridor, and saw nobody.

I wasn't hungry or thirsty. I just wondered where the path was going. It traveled in a straight line, and was perfectly flat. The path never changed, but the countryside around it did. At first I was walking along the bottom of a ravine, grassy banks climbing steeply on each side of me. Later the path was above everything, and as I walked I could look down at the treetops below me, and the roofs of occasional distant houses. My path was always flat and straight, and I walked along it through valleys and plateaus, valleys and plateaus. And eventually, in one of these valleys, I came to the bridge.

It was built of clean red brick, a huge curving arch over the path. At the side of the bridge were stone steps cut into the embankment and at the top of the steps, a little wooden gate.

I was surprised to see any token of the existence of humanity on my path, which I was by now certain was a natural formation, like a volcano. And, with a sense more of curiosity than anything else (I had, after all, walked hundreds of miles, or so I was convinced, and might be *anywhere*), I climbed the stone steps and went through the gate.

I was nowhere.

The top of the bridge was paved with mud. On each side of it was a meadow. The meadow on my side was a wheat field; the other was just grass. There were caked imprints of huge tractor wheels in the dried mud. I walked across the bridge to be sure: no trip-trap, my bare feet were soundless.

Nothing for miles; just fields and wheat and trees.

I picked a stalk of wheat, and pulled out the sweet grains, peeling them between my fingers, chewing them meditatively.

I realized then that I was getting hungry, and went back down the stairs to the abandoned railway track. It was time to go home. I was not lost; all I needed to do was follow my path home once more.

There was a troll waiting for me, under the bridge.

"I'm a troll," he said. Then he paused and added, more or less as an afterthought, "Fol rol de ol rol."

He was huge: his head brushed the top of the brick arch. He was

more or less translucent: I could see the bricks and trees behind him, dimmed but not lost. He was all my nightmares given flesh. He had huge, strong teeth, and rending claws, and strong, hairy hands. His hair was long, like one of my sister's little plastic gonks, and his eyes bulged. He was naked, and his penis hung from the bush of gonk hair between his legs.

"I heard you, Jack," he whispered, in a voice like the wind. "I heard you trip-trapping over my bridge. And now I'm going to eat your life."

I was only seven, but it was daylight, and I do not remember being scared. It is good for children to find themselves facing the elements of a fairy tale—they are well-equipped to deal with these.

"Don't eat me," I said to the troll. I was wearing a striped brown T-shirt and brown corduroy trousers. My hair also was brown, and I was missing a front tooth. I was learning to whistle between my teeth, but wasn't there yet.

"I'm going to eat your life, Jack," said the troll.

I stared the troll in the face. "My big sister is going to be coming down the path soon," I lied, "and she's far tastier than me. Eat her instead."

The troll sniffed the air, and smiled. "You're all alone," he said. "There's nothing else on the the path. Nothing at all." Then he leaned down and ran his fingers over me: it felt like butterflies were brushing my face—like the touch of a blind person. Then he snuffled his fingers and shook his huge head. "You don't have a big sister. You've only a younger sister, and she's at her friend's today."

"Can you tell all that from smell?" I asked, amazed.

"Trolls can smell the rainbows, trolls can smell the stars," it whispered, sadly. "Trolls can smell the dreams you dreamed before you were ever born. Come close to me and I'll eat your life."

"I've got precious stones in my pocket," I told the troll. "Take them, not me. Look." I showed him the lava jewel rocks I had found earlier.

"Clinker," said the troll. "The discarded refuse of steam trains. Of no value to me."

He opened his mouth wide. Sharp teeth. Breath that smelled of leaf mould and the underneaths of things. "Eat. Now."

He became more and more solid to me, more and more real; and the world outside became flatter, began to fade.

"Wait." I dug my feet into the damp earth beneath the bridge, wiggled my toes, held on tightly to the real world. I stared into his big eyes. "You don't want to eat my life. Not yet. I—I'm only seven. I haven't *lived* at all yet. There are books I haven't read yet. I've never been on an aeroplane. I can't whistle yet—not really. Why don't you let me go? When I'm older and bigger and more of a meal, I'll come back to you."

The troll stared at me with eyes like headlamps.

Then it nodded.

"When you come back, then," it said. And it smiled.

I turned around and walked back down the silent, straight path where the railway lines had once been.

After a while I began to run.

I pounded down the track in the green light, puffing and blowing,

until I felt a stabbing ache beneath my rib-cage, the pain of a stitch, and, clutching my side, I stumbled home.

THE FIELDS STARTED TO GO, AS I GREW OLDER. ONE BY ONE, ROW BY ROW, houses sprang up with roads named after wildflowers and respectable authors. Our home—an aging, tattered victorian house—was sold, and torn down; new houses covered the garden.

They built houses everywhere.

I once got lost in the new housing estate which covered two meadows I had once known every inch of. I didn't mind too much that the fields were going, though. The old manor house was bought by a multinational, and the grounds became more houses.

It was eight years before I returned to the old railway line, and when I did, I was not alone.

I was fifteen; I'd changed schools twice in that time. Her name was Louise, and she was my first love.

I loved her gray eyes, and her fine, light brown hair, and her gawky way of walking (like a fawn just learning to walk which sounds really dumb, for which I apologize). I saw her chewing gum, when I was thirteen, and I fell for her like a suicide from a bridge.

The main trouble with being in love with Louise was that we were best friends, and we were both going out with other people.

I'd never told her I loved her, or even that I fancied her. We were buddies.

I'd been at her house that evening: we sat in her room and played *Rattus Norvegicus*, the first Stranglers LP. It was the beginning of punk, and everything seemed so exciting: the possibilities, in music as in everything else, were endless. Eventually it was time for me to go home, and she decided to accompany me. We held hands, innocently, just pals, and we strolled the ten-minute walk to my house.

The moon was bright, and the world was visible and colorless, and the night was warm.

We got to my house. Saw the lights inside, and stood in the driveway, and talked about the band I was starting. We didn't go in. Then it was decided that I'd walk *her* home. So we walked back to her house.

I T WAS DARK BENEATH THE BRIDGE, but the shape of the troll filled the darkness. My heart pounded, and I could feel myself trembling. I grabbed Louise, a taut zombie, and pushed her forward. "Don't take me. I don't want to die. Take her. I bet she's much tastier than me. Why don't you take her?"

She told me about the battles she was having with her younger sister, who was stealing her makeup and perfume. Louise suspected that her sister was having sex with boys. Louise was a virgin. We both were.

We stood in the road outside her house, under the sodium yellow streetlight, and we stared at each other's black lips and pale yellow faces.

We grinned at each other.

Then we just walked, picking quiet roads and empty paths. In one of the new housing estates a path led us into the woodland, and we followed it.

The path was straight and dark; but the lights of distant houses shone like stars on the ground, and the moon gave us enough light to see. Once we were scared, when something snuffled and snorted in front of us. We pressed close, saw it was a badger, laughed and hugged and kept on walking.

We talked quiet nonsense about what we dreamed and wanted and thought.

And all the time I wanted to kiss her and feel her breasts, and maybe put my hand between her legs.

Finally I saw my chance. There was an old brick bridge over the path, and we stopped beneath it. I pressed up against her. Her mouth opened against mine.

Then she went cold and stiff, and stopped moving.

"Hello," said the troll.

I let go of Louise. It was dark beneath the bridge, but the shape of the troll filled the darkness.

"I froze her," said the troll, "so we can talk. Now: I'm going to eat your life."

My heart pounded, and I could feel myself trembling.

"No."

"You said you'd come back to me. And you have. Did you learn to whistle?"

"Yes."

"That's good. I never could whistle." It sniffed, and nodded. "I am pleased. You have grown in life and experience. More to eat. More for me."

I grabbed Louise, a taut zombie, and pushed her forward. "Don't take me. I don't want to die. Take *her*. I bet she's much tastier than me. And she's two months older than I am. Why don't you take her?"

The troll was silent.

It sniffed Louise from toe to head, snuffling at her feet and crotch and breasts and hair.

Then it looked at me.

"She's an innocent," it said. "You're not. I don't want her. I want you."

I walked to the opening of the bridge and stared up at the stars in the night.

"But there's so much I've never done," I said, partly to myself. "I mean, I've never...well, I've never had sex. And I've never been to America. I haven't..." I paused. "I haven't *done* anything. Not yet."

The troll said nothing.

"I could come back to you. When I'm older."

The troll said nothing.

I will come back. Honest I will.

"Come back to me?" said Louise. "Why? Where are you going?"

I turned around. The troll had gone, and the girl I had thought I loved was standing in the shadows beneath the bridge.

"We're going home," I told her. "Come on."

We walked back, and never said anything.

She went out with the drummer in the punk band I started and, much later, married someone else. We met once, on a train, after she was married, and she asked me if I remembered that night.

I said I did.

"I really liked you, that night, Jack," she told me. "I thought you were going to kiss me. I thought you were going to ask me out. I would have said yes. If you had."

"But I didn't."

"No," she said. "You didn't." Her hair was cut very short. It didn't suit her.

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THE BEHOLDER

BY JEAN LORRAH

Illustration by Carol Heyer

Challenged by a love-struck prince to break a wizard's hideous spell, a young witch learns a lesson about love's ability to defeat even the most powerful magic.

I DO NOT MAKE THE rules of magick natureel. I do but abide by them.

The people of our small village by the sea come to me seeking magic, a charm to ward off illness, advice on when to plow or plant, or the best day to launch a new fishing boat. In all of those things, people are willing to abide by nature. But in love they seek time and again to thwart nature, to give themselves beauty in another's eyes, or to force someone to love them.

It is in the pursuit of love that I have most often been mistaken, for charms and feelings forced by magic are not real. Over many years I have learned caution, but when I was young I thought everyone deserving of love. Perhaps it was a way of soothing mine own romantic feelings, for one thing a witch woman cannot do is make magic for her own use.

They say there is a man for every woman, no matter how ill-favored she may be—one who will love her with his whole heart, let the world think what it

will. Looking about any village in the land, you will see that sometimes even the poorest and ugliest have husbands who can see the true beauty in their hearts. But only sometimes. Far more often they are miserable wretches, left to fend for themselves, or mistreated by loutish husbands. When I think of such misfortune, I cannot but recall the time when I was still a young woman and new to my calling

and was asked not to make a charm, but to break one.

The young squire, son of the franklin, was of an age with me, but like the other girls of our village by the sea, I could only admire him from a distance. He did not go to the local school but had tutors until he was sent away first to the monks and then to university. When he came home, though, the village rejoiced. He was so beloved for his kind words and good deeds that people never even mentioned what a handsome young man he had grown to be. Not that we young women failed to notice.

Jankyn provided venison when the harshest winter

The wizard appeared with a thunderbolt and a flash of lightning. 'I provided you with the joyous news of your future, and in return you first insulted and then ignored me... This child will never give you grandchildren, for no man will ever willingly touch her!' and he waved his wand over the baby girl, who became instantly so hideous that her nurse screamed and turned away, and her own mother fainted."

in memory froze the fishing fleet in the harbor. That same winter he gave the villagers firewood from the franklin's lands, and later sent his laborers to replace the mud-and-wattle houses that burned when people stoked the fires too high to ward off the bitter cold. Everyone spoke of his goodness and courtesy to all.

When a neighboring kingdom declared war, the young squire led a troop of local men and returned a hero with a knighthood. That was when the franklin decided it was time for his son to marry... and that brought Jankyn to me.

WHEN HE APPEARED AT MY DOOR, I THOUGHT he came seeking further charms against the disease stalking our community—the plague which always follows when times of deprivation have made people weak. His own father had been gravely ill, and when I saw Jankyn standing there, my first fear was that the franklin had suffered a relapse.

But no, his father was improving daily—and for that very reason Jankyn had come to me with an extraordinary tale. It seemed that during his service in the army, our young squire had been wounded, blinded by an exploding cannon. A lady of the local gentry nursed him back to health. No surprise that he loved her before he ever saw her face.

"I fell in love with her gentle, capable hands," he said, "and her voice, sweet and pure and intelligent."

"Intelligent? Her voice?" I asked, and he smiled at his own nonsense.

"What she said," he amended. "She sat and talked with me for hours when pain and the fear of blindness disturbed my rest. She is bright, charming... and I love her."

"Then what is the problem?" I asked. "Is she betrothed or married to another?"

"No. I told her I loved her, and she told me... she is ugly. A man might love her as a sister, perhaps, but never as a man loves his wife."

"And is she right?" I asked.

He sighed. Then he replied, pain in his voice, "Her ugliness is far beyond ill-favor. I don't care... but my father will. When the bandages were to come off my eyes, Greta was not there. When my sight adjusted, I looked for her, but only the other women were present. They told me she could not bear to have me see her."

"But you could not be satisfied with that."

"Of course not! As soon as I had the strength to walk about the castle, I went in search of her. She was with some gravely wounded soldiers who had just been brought in, nursing and comforting them. I followed her beautiful voice. She knelt praying by the side of a dying man, and I knew that God accepted his soul simply because Greta prayed that He would."

He paused, but I had nothing to say, so waited for him to continue his story. "She was facing away from me, kneeling. All I could see

was her slender back as she bent over the man she had comforted and drew the blanket up over his face. When she rose, her back remained bent and crooked. She turned, and I saw her face. She had spoken truly: she is quite astonishingly ugly." The words, spoken flatly, were wholly inadequate to express the pain I saw in the young squire's eyes.

"And?" I prompted.

"And I ran away!" he said angrily. "The very next moment I knew that I loved her no matter how she looked, but she had seen my unguarded reaction and refused to talk to me."

"My wounds had healed. I had to return to battle. God forgive me for that moment of weakness! I wrote to her from the field, begging her forgiveness, but received no answer."

"Did you return to the castle where you met her?"

"I wanted to, but as you know, my father was ill. As soon as the war was over, I rushed home."

The young squire's return had been far greater tonic than any potion I could devise, but it was probably his brush with mortality that had put the idea of grandchildren so firmly in the old man's mind.

"Now your father wants you to choose a wife," I prompted, "but you are already in love with Greta."

"I can't think of anyone else, nor can I take an interest in the women my father introduces me to. I don't care what she looks like—Greta is the only woman I can imagine spending my life with."

"Then... what need have you of my spells?" I asked.

"I wish you to break a spell cast by another... the spell of Greta's ugliness."

"Ah," I said. "Then she was not born ugly."

"No. The other women told me the story. Greta's father and mother were childless and finally went to a local wizard for a fertility spell. He cast the runes and found that they would have no sons, but that their grandson would be a great leader of men. That pleased them, for if fate decreed a grandchild, fate must also decree a child. And so they left the wizard without commissioning the spell."

"I see. They insulted his power. And... did they compound their error by not paying him?"

"I'm afraid so," said the young squire. "Just over a year later their daughter was born, a beautiful baby girl they named Greta. But on the day they presented the child, just a few weeks old, to all their friends, the wizard appeared with a thunderbolt and a flash of lightning. 'I provided you with the joyous news of your future,' he told them, 'and in return you first insulted and then ignored me. I rescind that joyous future! This child will never give you grandchildren, for no man will ever willingly touch her!' and he waved his wand over the baby girl, who became instantly so hideous that her nurse screamed and turned away, and her own mother fainted."

"The poor child," I could not help but whisper, pitying the innocent victim of her parents' stupidity and a wizard's prickly pride.

"Greta does not think of herself as a poor child," said the young

squire. "She has grown up good and kind. Her beauty is inside. But..." he chewed his lip, trying to find words to explain.

"But your father will not accept beauty that cannot be seen, nor will the people of the village," I said flatly. "You seek to have the spell on her removed. But, squire, I am no wizard. I doubt I have the ability to persuade one to remove his spell."

"No," he replied, "that perhaps I could do, for even wizards have desires which a man might find a way to meet. But this wizard died some dozen years ago. He is not available to remove the spell. So, I have come to you."

I could offer the young squire no promises—I am a simple witch woman, no match for a wizard's power. The tiny hope I could provide came from the fact that the wizard was no longer available to counteract any spell I might devise. "But your first task," I told the young squire, "is to persuade Greta to come to me."

"That," he said, "I know how to do."

And, indeed, not a fortnight later a ship from Greta's land sailed into our harbor, and from it embarked several ladies in gowns of plain design, along with one squat, limping figure dressed the same as the others except for the veil over her face, which allowed only a slit for her eyes.

I was privy to Jankyn's plan to bring Greta and the other lady nurses to our country. It was only half a lie that our village needed their help: the epidemic our soldiers had brought back was some fever our people had no resistance to. In the very old, the very young, and those weakened by the recent lean years, it often turned to pneumonia. Everywhere, people nursed friends and families, falling with exhaustion themselves.

Greta and her ladies commandeered the guildhall as an infirmary. Within a day, everyone was blessing their help and kindness, and in particular praising the sweet voice and capable hands of the Lady Greta. Among strangers, she wore her veil at all times. Then, as she and I administered a fever-reducing potion to old Saul the baker, Saul's wife Marj and their daughters appeared with a cart laden with soup.

We had worked all night and half the day with nothing but a few mouthfuls of water. The soup smelled wonderful. "Sit ye down," Marj insisted. "We'll feed the patients. You ladies need nourishment yerseln," and she handed out bowls of hearty broth along with hunks of bread.

I sank gratefully to the floor, while Greta sat clumsily on a three-legged stool near the cloths we had hung to give the patients privacy. She turned away from old Saul and me as she lifted her veil. "Lady Greta," I said, "you are among friends. You need not fear to show your face."

There was a long pause before she turned around, veil in place, holding the untouched soup and bread on her lap. "I must not disgust the patients while they are eating," she said softly. What struck me most at that moment was the total absence of self-pity in her beautiful voice. There was only concern for the comfort of others.

"If anyone's disgusted," I told her, "such ungrateful louts deserve

to miss a meal!"

I could see only her eyes, beautiful as Jankyn had said they were, and in them a tentative smile. Then, hesitantly, she unfastened her veil.

As the young squire had said, she was astonishingly ugly. Her nose turned up like a pig's snout, and crowded teeth emerged from her lower jaw to thrust upward like tusks. They distorted her mouth, pushing her chin forward aggressively.

The beauty of her eyes was hidden by heavy bone above and beneath them, so that when not framed by her veil they seemed to disappear, great hairy brows obscuring their luminescence. It was a face to frighten children...but we were no children in that room, and all of us managed to contain our horror and pity in the face of Greta's courage.

"Eat up," I managed to say in quite natural tones. "Marj's soup wins at the autumn fair every year!"

Eating was a painfully slow process for Greta. Her distorted mouth could take only small bites of food if she did not want to risk it squirting out and running down her chin. Obviously, she had practiced long and hard to achieve grace at table, but nevertheless we all stared in horrified fascination. Deliberately, I turned to start a conversation with Marj and her daughters. Usually they were reticent about talking to the witch woman, never sure when some casual comment might offend, or give me power over them. But their desire not to embarrass poor Greta produced a conversation long enough to allow Greta some nourishment.

I came away from that encounter determined to help Greta if it was humanly possible. The epidemic was nearly over, and she and her ladies would soon leave. I spent the night poring over my tomes, searching for a way to remove the oversensitive wizard's hideous spell. If bad fortune had turned her sour, I would probably not have cared, but Greta deserved better than life had dealt her. Life isn't fair, but one of the few joys of magick is occasionally being able to do something about it.

Greta and her ladies were quartered, when they could spare the time from the infirmary, at the franklin's great house. The young squire escorted them to and from the village and worked his own wiles on Greta at every opportunity. It was obvious that he loved her; little wonder that he was able to win her love despite her lifetime of defenses.

Still, she would not have him. Despondent, he came to me again the day before the ladies were to sail for home.

"Can you make me a love spell?" Jankyn asked.

"You don't need one," I told him. "Anyone can see that Greta loves you."

"Then a spell to bind her here! Please! She's the only woman I'll ever love. Why can't she see that?"

"Because she always thinks of others rather than herself," I told him. "What does your father say?"

The young squire hung his head. "He says he loves Greta as a daughter already, but fears to have deformed grandchildren." Then

She was astonishingly ugly. Her nose turned up like a pig's snout, and crowded teeth emerged from her lower jaw to thrust upward like tusks. They distorted her mouth, pushing her chin forward aggressively. The beauty of her eyes was hidden by heavy bone...so that when not framed by her veil they seemed to disappear, great hairy brows obscuring their luminescence. It was a face to frighten children....

he looked up at me. "Greta also fears her children will inherit her appearance. I've reminded her of the prophecy, that one of her children will become a great leader. Surely her true nature is what will be passed on to her children. Still she will not budge."

"Bring her here," I told him. "I have been studying everything I can find about wizards' spells."

"Can you take the spell off?" Jankyn demanded.

"I don't know," I replied honestly. "Bring Greta here tonight, and I will tell you my conclusions and the decisions you will have to make."

MAGICK IS A COMPLICATED BUSINESS. OH, SOME is quite straightforward, knowing which poultices will staunch bleeding or stimulate a healing fever, but a great deal depends on the state of the human heart—both the hearts of the persons for whom the spell is done, and mine own.

I don't think I have ever sought to do magic with a purer heart than I did that evening. I had no power to lift the spell that crotchety wizard had put on Greta. Had he lived to see the strong and blessed woman she had become, he would surely have been shamed into removing it—probably for rich reward and undeserved gratitude. But he was dead and the spell was permanent.

However, I found a countercharm, a spell upon a spell, as it were, but one that would require a hard decision from Jankyn and Greta.

When they arrived, I told them the good news first. "The spell is only on you, Lady Greta. Any children you have will be as beautiful as if no spell had ever been cast."

"That answers my father's only objection!" said Jankyn.

"It is still unfair to burden you with such an ugly wife," Greta protested.

"Do you love Jankyn?" I asked Greta.

It was not coyness that made her hesitate, but finally, "Yes," she admitted.

"Would you marry him if you could be beautiful for him?"

"Yes," she replied. "But a witch woman cannot remove the spell of a wizard." Obviously I was not the only one who had done research.

I brought forth my magic mirror. "I do not like what I see in the mirror," Greta objected. "I accept it, but I do not like it."

"Jankyn, stand behind her," I told him. "Now both of you look at Lady Greta's reflection."

Jankyn put a hand on her shoulder to give her courage, and together they stared at the ugly, distorted visage reflected in the glass.

This was a simple illusion. A moment's concentration, and the face in the mirror changed. Gone were the tusks, the ugly growths of bone, the matted overgrown brows. The nose assumed a normal shape above a sweetly smiling mouth. Beautiful, serene eyes emerged from obscurity. "This is how Lady Greta would have looked without the wizard's spell."

Greta's chin trembled, and tears slid down her cheeks—sparkling crystal drops in the mirror, wet tracks on either side of a reddened

nose in reality. But while Jankyn's eyes remained, entranced, on the image in the mirror, Greta's fixed on me. "Why do you torture us? You cannot make me look like this image."

"But I can," I replied.

At that, Jankyn gasped and turned to look at me as well. "How?" he asked. "What do I have to do? I'll pay you anything to end Greta's suffering!"

"Jankyn," Greta interrupted. "I do not suffer, except that I see you suffer."

"Lady Greta," I said, "if I could make you look as you did in the mirror just now, why would you want it?"

"So that I could be the wife that Jankyn deserves."

"And Jankyn—why would you want it?"

"So the world would see Greta as she truly is."

I sighed. "Unfortunately, her appearance is not an illusion. I have no way of changing her flesh and blood form."

"Then, what are you offering?" asked Jankyn.

"A charm, a spell, to cause Greta's soul, her personality, to be seen instead of her flesh and bone."

"Another illusion," Greta said sadly. "I see no benefit to some temporary charm." She waved her hand at the mirror, which now gave back all her external ugliness.

"No, not temporary," I said. "I will tie my spell into the strength of that spell the wizard cast on you. If it is ever lifted, then so will be the illusion I create. But then," I said with a smile and a shrug, "you won't need my spell anymore, will you?"

I had thought Greta didn't smile because she had little to smile about. Now I saw the hideous distortion of her face as she turned to Jankyn. But he did not misinterpret the grimace. "Do it!" he said. "I don't care what it costs!"

"Your favor," I told him. "Your protection in those times when I become a convenient scapegoat."

"That is nothing you would not have had anyway."

"Then you must make a choice."

"What choice?" Greta asked.

"A hard choice," I told them, "and a test of your love. There are some spells designed to test the character, and the only one I could find to restore your appearance, my lady, is one of those. There is no way I can make everyone see you as beautiful."

"Jankyn is the only one I care about," she replied.

"That may be your choice, but there is another. Each of you must choose, in your heart of hearts, who will see you as beautiful, and who will see you as ugly. Jankyn, Greta can be beautiful to you and ugly to everyone else. If you so choose, you will have the comfort of her loveliness, but she will continue to suffer as she does now: strangers will be repulsed by her, children will fear her, and even those who know and love her will pity her.

"The other option is that she will appear beautiful to everyone else...but you alone will face her ugliness. What you see before you now is what you will face all the days—and all the nights—of your

Greta's chin trembled, and tears slid down her cheeks—sparkling crystal drops in the mirror, wet tracks on either side of a reddened nose in reality. But while Jankyn's eyes remained, entranced, on the image in the mirror, Greta's fixed on me. "Why do you torture us? You cannot make me look like this image."

But as love and joy poured from the crowd, I saw Jankyn's look change to utter joy. I felt a swell of pride in this man who had sacrificed his personal pleasure to end his bride's life of misery, and then I felt a stab of jealousy, knowing there was such a man in the world and that he belonged to another. But along with joy I saw puzzlement on the young squire's face.

lives together. Other men will envy you your beautiful wife, but you will never enjoy her beauty."

"Jankyn," Greta whispered, "I cannot do that to you. I don't care about the rest of the world—I'm used to their stares, their pity."

"No!" he insisted. "I love *you*, Greta. I don't care what you look like to me—but you must be free from stares and pity."

Had I been in Greta's place I would have argued for not appearing ugly to the rest of the world. I would have told my lover that the heir to his father's estate must have a wife appropriate to his station. And had I been in Jankyn's place, I would have argued that the people already loved her and had no need of a beautiful exterior to be persuaded of her worth.

I could not help but feel a stab of jealousy at their pure, unselfish love, and a grim satisfaction in knowing that these perfect lovers would spend that night in argument. "You must decide," I told them, "before sunrise tomorrow. As the sun rises, divide this potion and each drink off your half, holding your choice in your heart. From that moment on, things will be as you have chosen. But take heed: if you wish at cross-purposes, you will nullify the spell."

Jankyn took the potion with trembling hands and tucked it carefully away. Hand in hand, he and Greta left my hut.

Despite my weariness from the hard work during the epidemic and nights spent searching for a solution for Jankyn and Greta, curiosity had me up at dawn. I found the village abuzz even at that early hour: Greta was not leaving with the rest of the ladies!

So they must have come to some agreement. I was desperate to know which they had chosen—his comfort, or hers. When the Franklin's carriage arrived in the village square, Jankyn's father emerged to announce that his son and the Lady Greta were engaged to be married. The cheer from the assembled villagers warmed even my weary heart: No matter what Greta looked like to them, they had learned to love her. Then Jankyn emerged, somewhat shamefaced, and turned to hand Greta out.

She was as ugly as ever—either they had wished at cross-purposes or Jankyn had yielded to his own selfish interest.

But then, as Greta climbed the guildhall steps to stand beside Jankyn, I heard gasps of astonishment around me. "That's not Greta!" someone exclaimed.

"She's beautiful!" cried another.

And Marj the baker's wife broke out sobbing, "Love broke the spell! Ah, ain't she the most beautiful thing you e'er seen?"

It was my spell Greta wore—obviously I was the only person there immune to it. But why should Jankyn look ashamed if he had chosen Greta's comfort over his own...unless he was having second thoughts about the pleasures of his marriage bed?

But as love and joy poured from the crowd, I saw Jankyn's look change to utter joy. I felt a swell of pride in this man who had sacrificed his personal pleasure to end his bride's life of misery, and then I felt a stab of jealousy, knowing there was such a man in the world and that he belonged to another.

But along with joy I saw puzzlement on the young squire's face. He stared from Greta to the crowd and back again, as if he could not believe his eyes or ears.

Before my uncharmed eyes, Greta blushed an ugly red and smiled her distorted grimace, but Jankyn beamed as if she were as smooth-faced and sweet lipped as the harvest queen.

I worked my way through the crowd, both to congratulate the happy couple and to try to find out what in the name of all magick had happened. Jankyn called me forward to announce that I had broken the spell on Greta. "No," I told him as the crowd broke up and we joined the franklin in ambling toward the tavern, "you two did it."

"You said it would work only one way," said Greta. "Why does everyone say I'm beautiful when we wished only for Jankyn to see me that way?"

"I didn't," said Jankyn. "I wished for everyone else to see you beautiful—but when I saw you this morning I cursed myself, thinking that in my secret heart I must have wished selfishly and condemned you to a life of ugliness."

Greta turned to me with a frown that on the visage I saw was thoroughly intimidating. "You said if we wished at cross-purposes, nothing would happen."

"No," I explained, "I said that it would nullify the spell, which has been my past experience. But in those cases, no matter the unselfish words they spoke, each party in his heart of hearts made his wish to his own advantage. This is the first time I have ever known both parties to such a spell to choose unselfishly."

I never told Jankyn and Greta that I alone continued to see the blushing bride as hideous, nor that I do so to this day. Over the years, I'm told, she has evolved from a young woman's loveliness to an elegant maturity; I see a hunchbacked crone. No matter, of course, except to me. I suppose I shall never know whether my first thought was correct, that I cannot be fooled by my own spell, or whether that stab of jealousy I felt and still sometimes feel at the total love that Greta found in Jankyn condemned me alone to witness her outward ugliness as a reminder of my inward imperfection.

Greta gave Jankyn three children, all perfect and beautiful, and they continue as happy as it is possible for mere mortals to be. Their son is a young man grown now, and he has already gained favor with the king for his courage and wisdom—he is well on his way to fulfilling the prophecy that he will be a great leader. Their older daughter married an earl and recently presented them with twin grandsons.

And I live out my days alone in my cottage on the cliffside, for all my magical knowledge a mere onlooker to their selfless love—a human condition which, before meeting Jankyn and Greta, I had not believed possible. Now I know (but have never experienced myself) that beauty is seen by the heart, not the eyes, and unselfish love can work miracles.

But in my whole long lifetime, theirs is the only such miracle I have ever witnessed. ■

The Wise Woman comes in the guise of an owl, clear of eye, strong of heart, and luminous with compassion. Surrounding her are the other guises she wears: faerie, trickster, horned woman, sylph, and the unassuming figure on the bottom left: the wise woman within us all. OPPOSITE: This Devon Faery and her companions live in the forests and hedgerows of Southwest England.



THE WOMAN OF FAERY

AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, the "Golden Age" book illustrators Arthur Rackham, Edmund Dulac, Heath Robinson and Kay Nielson conjured such distinctive images of fairy tale lands that these images have been passed down to us along with the tales themselves, influencing the way we view magical stories, and the magic within our world. One man's work is doing that today.



The faery paintings of Brian Froud have colored our vision of the faery realms with the rich, earthy tones of his own strong vision, as well as influencing a whole new generation of magical painters, book illustrators and filmmakers.

BY TERRI WINDLING



Brian Froud's work first became widely known in the mid-1970s, with the publication of the art book *Faeries*, which he co-created with Alan Lee. This was followed by *The Land of Froud*, a collection of paintings published in David Larkin's Peacock Press series. Soon after, Brian joined with the puppeteer and filmmaker Jim Henson to bring whimsical, magical worlds to life in the movies *The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*, both based on Brian's art and designs. It was on the set of the first film that Brian met his wife Wendy, an accomplished artist in her own right whose work (as a puppetmaker and sculptor) draws creative sustenance from the same mythic roots. Together they have created a unique, enchanted world that lies in the twilight shadows of our own, peopled with faeries and luminous creatures whose essence is starlight and moonlight, water and wood, ivy and stone.

IF THERE CAN BE SAID TO BE A painterly equivalent to the literary school of Magical Realism, then the work of Brian Froud exemplifies it, rooted as it is in the real world countryside of Dartmoor, England where he makes his home. It is a land of thatched cottages and winding hedgerow lanes, of old stone circles on the windswept moor and tumbled stone ruins in the moss shrouded woods. The Frouds live and work in an ancient thatched longhouse buried in trees and ivy. To open the heavy wood door of their house is to open a gate that leads back through time and into the faerielands.

Inside, there are faeries everywhere: in paintings on the old stone walls, lounging on shelves and tabletops, made of fimo and plaster, cloth and wood, leaves, feathers, fur and bone. Goblin faces hold up the stair rail; a Green Man watches from the huge stone hearth. Wendy's sculptures of faeries and Pre-Raphaelite ladies sit poised on stacks of



mythology books, or snooze among the Morris cloths, looking so perfectly lifelike you find yourself waiting for them to wake.

Brian's studio is a mysterious place in the oldest corner of the house, with a low wood door that is always shut. In the years that I have known him I have been allowed into that private room only once, and thus I shan't describe it—we must be content with the images that emerge from the room like faery gifts. Brian has worked consistently and hard in the years since *The Land of Froud* was published, pushing further and further into the faery realm, bringing back bright visions like traveler's tales. When asked to show his recent work, he disappears behind the studio door and comes back with paintings under his arms, dozen and dozens of them, each one more exquisite than the last.

Here's a series of paintings, witty, wise and wondrous, created for each of the mystical Runes (from the book by Ralph Blum). Here's a whimsical series of Trickster spirits—the kind who misplace your car keys and throw out every other sock and snatch the words right out of your mouth. Here are faery creatures in their many guises: delicate maids with wings of light, earthy lads made of leaves and knotted roots, wicked-eyed piskies and sexy green sylphs, all creatures bound to the natural world and the forms of the deep English woods.

The faery beings he portrays, Brian explains, are not meant to be mere illustrations of archaic tales set Once Upon a Time. They are expressions of the vital energies that make up the world we live in now. Brian has

LEFT: Hestia holds the mask of the Red Man of the Wood, the mask of leaf and fire. This painting of Marja Lee, wife of fellow Devon painter Alan Lee, was the inspiration behind Charles de Lint's novella "The Wild Wood," the first book in the new Brian Froud's Faerielands series (Bantam, 1994). ABOVE: The woodland Green Man's face peers out from a mask of leaves. This figure is found throughout history in many cultures (see Mythology column this issue). BELOW: The Spiritual Warrior holds a sword of light, the expression of power forged from within. A figure both archaic and contemporary, she sits at the gateway of the spiritual journey with the rune of the warrior beneath her feet, steadfast in her strength. She is one of a series of paintings for each of the divinatory runes (Runes by Ralph Blum, St. Martin's Press).



long been a student of Celtic and world mythologies; like Joseph Campbell, he uses the potent symbols of myth and dream as guideposts to mark the life paths we travel, the roads of transformation and healing, and the circular path that leads to wisdom.

MOST RECENTLY, he's begun to explore archetypal images of women in a series of paintings (and eventually a book) he calls *Women of Power*. The images on these pages, most of them published here for the first time, are part of this new series of aspects of the Eternal Feminine: queens, enchantresses, seers, sibyls, huntresses and golden sphinxes. "The image of women," Brian comments, "has always been, in mythological terms, the spiritual expression of the deep inner rhythms of nature and the human soul. These figures represent not only the cycle of the year from spring to winter, but also the


BELOW: *The Dark of the Moon* is a time of dreams, witchery, and regeneration. The pomegranate held in the hand of this dark queen is symbolic of rebirth and the moon's cyclic power. The image was used as the cover art for *The Dreaming Place* by Charles de Lint (Atheneum, 1990). **RIGHT:** Morgan le Fay, Arthur's sorceress sister, is portrayed in her aspect of the queen of the night. The stars are captured in her raven black hair, reminding us of the beauty and the power of the dark. **OPPOSITE:** *The Magician* is a "Trickster" figure, the female equivalent of Puck, Loki, Coyote and other creatures of myth whose wild unpredictability—sometimes humorous, sometimes dangerous—stirs up the world and brings color to our lives.



mythic stages of women: Maiden, Bright Mother, Wise Woman/Crone, holding the bright power of ancient feminine wisdom to illuminate the dark corners of the psyche."

In addition to this series, Brian has recently completed 50 paintings and drawings that explore the connections between man, myth and nature. These drawings are part of an unusual collaboration between the artist and four fantasy writers. The artwork was created first, and then the images were divided between the writers (Charles de Lint, Patricia McKillip, Midori Snyder and myself), each of whom agreed to write a novella-length story inspired by Brian's pictures. The result is a four book series called Brian Froud's *Faerielands*. Volume One came out earlier this year: *The Wild Wood*, by De Lint.

In a more humorous vein, Brian's latest book, scheduled for fall publication, is a collaboration with Monty Python's Terry Jones. Called *Lady Cottingly's Pressed Faeries*, it is a wicked and thoroughly adult faery book, inspired by the famous Cottingham "fairy photographs" championed by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. A new volume of *Faeries* is also in the works, collecting the beautiful unpublished paintings that have sat tucked away in Brian's studio for far too long now. The faeries of the Dartmoor Woods will have to stop hoarding these paintings for themselves and be persuaded to let a wider audience see them, giving us all the chance to step inside Brian's luminous world and bring a bit of his magic back into our own.

The Frouds have created an enchanted environment in which to live and make their art. Their friendship is one I treasure, and the creative ferment of their lives fills me with quiet awe. But one needn't travel to English shores to enter into the Land of Froud. All you need is to look closely at a book or a picture created by Brian. Contained within each painting is a door into the Faery realms. 



Wielding the mighty Grimthwacker against The Horde.

A YOUNG HERO, A MAGICAL KINGDOM, A KINDLY KING, A SCHEMING CHANCELLOR, A powerful sword, and a ruthless enemy—all the elements of a classic, if cliché, fantasy. But there is something a bit different here. The young hero was raised by a herd of kindly cows. The great sword goes by the name "Grimthwacker." And the ruthless enemy is an onslaught of gluttonous red critters that look like sunburned cousins of the Tasmanian Devil.

Young Chauncey—serving lad at the king's castle, and adopted son of a dairy cow—was in the right place at the right time. When the king got a bit of his royal dinner stuck in his royal windpipe, Chauncey performed a quick, if anachronistic, Heimlich maneuver. As a reward the king presented Chauncey with the mighty Grimthwacker, and a nifty tract of land on the Shinto Plains. Now Chauncey has a chance to really make something of himself, to rise all the way from pasture to palace; if he can only fend off the ravenous Horde.

Crystal Dynamics has harnessed elements of both action and strategy games to make *The Horde* (available on 3DO Multiplayer and PC CD-ROM from Crystal Dynamics, 87 Encina Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94301) as playable as it is humorous. In the person of Chauncey, you set up defenses and prepare to save your villagers from wave after wave of Hordlings. Chauncey also has to take care to protect the crops of his village from the hungry invaders. Only by selling crops can you earn the funds you'll need to pay an ever-increasing tax burden. Funds are also essential to protecting the village, as every trap or shield you build will require an expenditure of cash. Besides, if you save enough money you can purchase that most valuable of possessions—a cow.

There are quite a few armaments available for securing your new home. Simple trenches can be dug which extend waterways. These will help increase the produc-

tion of crops, and if wide enough, will drown some approaching Hordlings. Fences will slow down a Hordling, but a few moments of head butting and teeth gnashing will make splinters of your fence. Stone walls do a better job, but cost more. If you want to get nasty, dig trenches lined with sharp stakes. One touch of these, and the average Hordling goes plop.

Your biggest weapon against the Horde is young Chauncey himself. When the Hordlings come, send Chauncey dashing about the village, thwacking in all directions. Just be careful not to swing and miss. Slicing only air can make Chauncey so dizzy that he's out of action for several critical seconds.

Fighting the Horde isn't the only time when seconds count. Hordlings come four times a year, but in the confines of the Shinto Plains, each season lasts but two minutes. In less than the time it takes to make a soft-boiled egg, you have to ready your village for the next round of invasion. Early on, your funds will probably represent a bigger restriction than the time, but as the situation becomes more and more difficult, two minutes begins to seem like two milliseconds.

Supporting the game play of *The Horde* are annual visits to the castle. This is where you'll see a segment of full motion video that relates to the current state of the game. In these minimovies former TV teenager Kurt Cameron, plays Chauncey. Wait! Come back! Cameron does OK. Even better are the chubby king and the cackling, bearded chancellor. Michael Gregory, of *Total Recall* and *RoboCop*, does a wonderful over-the-top turn as the chancellor. These characters are all taken from hoary fantasy clichés, and much of the video segments are spent having fun at the expense of these stuffed shirts. If you do well, the chancellor has a particularly awful time, suffering as he watches Chauncey garner one award after another.

More video comes your way in the form of crystal ball broadcasts from the Feudal News Network. These bulletins generally come midyear, and what you learn here can mean good times or tough times for your growing town. You might discover that there has been a bumper crop of cows this year, resulting in a bumper crop of cow...fertilizer. That's a good thing. You might also tune in your crystal ball to find the chancellor rubbing his hands together at the prospect of an upcoming tax hike. That's a bad thing. Either way, it pays to adjust your strategy to meet the news of the day.

Every now and then, your crystal ball is hijacked by

Young Chauncey (former TV teenager Kurt Cameron) defending the kingdom with the mighty Grimthwacker.



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pirate broadcasters whose agenda is a bit different than your own. Smiling lady Hordlings tell of the joys a human family can experience if they would but adopt a young, huggable Hordling of their own. Hordling broadcasters complain of the dastardly Chauncey and his unfair treatment of innocent cow admirers. *The Hordling* TV segments were created on the same kind of high-end Silicon Graphics workstation used to flesh out the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*.

When you've left the movie theater and the timer is counting down toward the next appearance of the Horde, it pays to know what you're up against. The first few years you'll confront nothing but the two most basic forms of Hordlings. These guys bounce around like rabbits with an attitude, swallowing your villagers, patting their well-stuffed tummies, and emitting very satisfied belches. Chauncey can do these guys in with one swing of Grimthwacker, and most traps will take them out quickly.

Before too long, you're up against Juggernaut Hordlings. These dino-sized brutes have a one-track mind. They walk in a slow, straight line toward your village, where they pop villagers down their oversized gullets like popcorn at the Bijou. It takes a lot of thwacks to put down a Juggernaut, and if they should notice you buzzing around, a thump from a massive fist can knock Chauncey halfway to next Tuesday.

Get past the Juggernauts, and you'll soon run into the smartest and most powerful of your foes—the Shaman Hordlings. These guys can teleport from one spot to another, blast your cows into raw hamburger, and worst of all, bring other Hordlings back from the dead. Dash and smash these guys quickly, or they'll undo all your good work.

If Chauncey survives all the Hordlings of the plains, he gets to visit all the other scenic spots of the kingdom. Fight the Horde in the forest, the fetid swamps, the desert, and the icy wastes. Each of these lands has its own special breed of Hordling to add to the regular crew. Forest Hordlings are like demented Keebler elves with blowguns. Desert Hordlings are burrowing purple unicorns with an eye on your food stores. Snow Hordlings are dead ringers for the Abominable Snowmonster in the old *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer* claymation film.

To get through all this mayhem, you may have to call in a little help. Fortunately, enough money can buy your own horde in the form of archers, knights, and even a dopey fire-breathing dragon. All these guys can help save your important people and your even more important cows. Just be careful when a Shaman comes on the scene. One word from a Hordling wizard can turn your own forces into Chauncey-cidal maniacs.

The Horde is one game where sound may play as important a role as sight. Even when they're off screen, you can hear your villagers and cows shouting for help. And you can hear the terrible Death Burp that lets you

know that they're beyond rescue.

With wonderful graphics, fluid animation and a fine mix of action and strategy, *The Horde* stacks up with the best computer games. Clear full-motion video, great sound, and top-notch production values, make it shine as digital theater. When it's all put together, this package stands out as one of the few multimedia titles that really deserves the name. Go out and thwack a few for me.

Magic: The Gathering Deckmaster: \$7.95;
Booster Packs: \$2.45; *Jyhad* (available later this year); *Deckmaster*: \$8.95.

A revolution is underway. Not the kind of revolution that involves guns and tanks—we get enough of those on CNN. This revolution is in the gaming industry, and if you haven't been hanging around hobby shops or the gaming rooms at science fiction conventions, you've missed something very interesting.

Two decades ago, *Dungeons & Dragons* came out of obscurity to capture the hearts



and minds of gamers around the world. Since then, thousands of new game systems have appeared. While several of these have established sizable niches, none of them has threatened the king of fantasy gaming. But this time the crown might just be in peril.

The culprit? A tiny little game from a tiny little company. Set up against the massive stack of *Advanced Dungeon & Dragon* manuals, and the corporate might of TSR, it looks like a case of David and Goliath. This time the underdog is an innocuous stack of playing cards called *Magic: The Gathering*, put out by a company named Wizards of the Coast. Like the original, this David may look puny, but he's got some powerful forces on his side.

Magic is a set of playing cards, 60 to the basic deck. Using these cards you play a game steeped in the traditional fantasy trappings: fantasy creatures, spells, counter-spells, counter-counter-spells, counter...well, you get the idea. But beneath the fantasy tropes, there's a game structure that is as flexible and simple as a game of hearts or Old Maid. That's not a bad thing. The simple nature of the basic game makes *Magic* easy to pick up. And as any tournament bridge player can tell you, "simple" card games are often deceptively simple, as they leave a lot of room for individual strategy and acquired skill.

Not the usual crap

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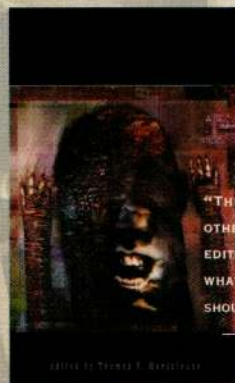
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A good portion of the game cards are marked as "lands." These can be swamps, mountains, forests, or some other type of terrain. When played, these land cards produce "mana." Mana is the stuff of magic in this game, and through its use the players cast spells, call on magical creatures, or prepare defenses against their opponent. The key here is that each kind of land produces a different type of mana: black mana from swamps, green from forests, blue from islands, and so on.

When it's time to cast a spell, you have to match the spells against the types of mana you have. In the middle of the game, this can make for a challenging, and frustrating, experience as you scramble to find a match between your power generating land cards and your power using spell and creature cards. The fact that you have to use up all the mana in play or take damage yourself makes the equation even more difficult. All too often, you find yourself with a handful of DC lands and AC creatures, leading to great gnashing of teeth—and joy on the part of your opponent.

While I've been calling some of the cards creature cards and some of them spell cards, they are all technically spells. Those cards that feature creatures are "summoning" cards. You cast a spell which brings the creatures to your aid. Thereafter, the creatures stand by, ready to attack or defend without further expenditure of mana. The remaining

spells are generally used in a single turn, and most often to back up the creatures you send out to do your bidding.

The range of creatures and spells available is formidable. In the course of a single round of combat, you may send out armies of treefolk and goblins, only to see them thwarted by opposing unicorns and merfolk, then watch ghouls clean up the survivors. To help your fighters, you might enchant them with a firebreathing spell, allowing them to do much greater damage than normal. To counter, your opponent might fling up a circle of protection and tend her creatures with a healing salve.

Unlike most fantasy games, the random element of the game is all at the outset. When you draw cards from your deck, you are at the mercy of the last shuffle. But in the heat of combat, there is no randomness. Your chances are as good as your ability to make do with the cards at hand. No one rolls a 20-sided die. In this game your powerful war mammoth need not fear being taken out by pint-sized fairy with a lucky streak. That's not to say that a stronger creature can't be felled by one much weaker, but if it happens, it happens because the opposing player brings other forces to bear.

The limiting factor in the game is the mana available and the cards in hand. Since only one land card can be played at a time, the pool of available mana grows slowly. In a game between beginners, this generally

leads to a steady back and forth of small spells. The players chip away at each other, using their mana as fast as it can be dropped on the table.

More experienced players may cling to powerful cards, laying out mana and using only the bare minimum to defend themselves as they prepare a complex assault. In a game like this, with two players eyeing each other and building toward a devastating arrangement of cards, the tension becomes thicker than plague rats in the black swamps. Finally, someone starts their move, and the cards fly fast and furious. Hands can be emptied in a turn, and the players can receive devastating damage. Then there is the scramble to recover, building toward another round of attack and defense.

Damage is taken against a core stack of points for each player. In each attack, creatures reserved for defense take the brunt of the beating. But if they are not up to stopping the full attack, the remainder falls squarely on the head of the player. When the player's points are finally depleted, the game is over.

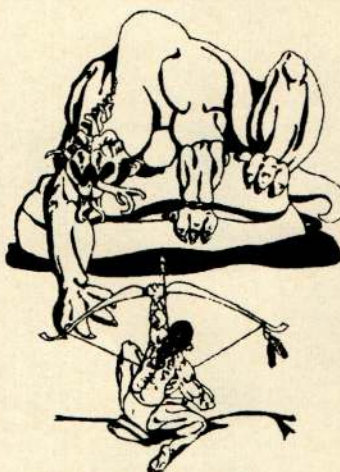
So, here is a game that's fairly simple, fast, and fun. But why has it become such an overwhelming success almost overnight? The secret is in what it leaves out. There are no 4-6-12-20-100-sided dice in this game. Several strategy guides have appeared, but all the rules you really need are packed in the box with the cards. You probably won't touch pen and paper unless it's to keep track



(Alien Break-in)



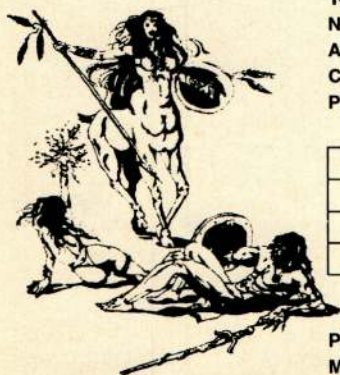
(Demon's Revenge)



(Archer's Nightmare)



(Skull Planet)



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(Nomad)

of a player's points, and if you can count to 20, you won't even need it for that.

Most important of all, this game leaves out the element that makes arranging other fantasy games always difficult—a group of people. *Magic* is a game for two players. You don't need an intrepid party of four, and you certainly don't need a dungeon master to steer the game along. Two people can meet, set up, and play a satisfactory game in less than 20 minutes. That's a far cry from the crowd of people, stacks of supplies, and hours of gaming needed for the traditional role-playing campaign.

Another factor propelling *Magic* to the top of the charts has nothing to do with the fantasy gaming crowd. *Magic* is printed on cards. Right now, we are in the middle of a card-collecting frenzy. There are sports cards, comics cards, serial killer cards, cards with old Coca-Cola ads on them, cards about cards. And all of these cards are being snatched up by collectors at a furious rate.

Remember that *Magic* comes with only 60 cards in the original pack? Well, there are over 300 cards in the total set, and expansion sets are driving this number toward 1000. Additional cards are available through "booster packs." In each of these, you'll get more of the cards that were in the basic pack, along with some that you've never seen before. While most fantasy games are relegated to hobby shops, *Magic* cards are showing up in every knick-knack stand that deals



Magic's burst of creativity is a welcome shot in the arm for the fantasy gaming market.

baseball cards or comic books from Maine to Montana. People come along and pick up a set of booster packs right along with their Upper Deck Central Region baseball cards. People own these cards who have never played a game.

Wizards of the Coast has been smart enough to create rarities in this card set. Some cards are so little seen, they are going for \$75 a pop on the collector's circuit. And since the rare cards are generally those with

really good spells, they're worth something to the game player as well as the card collector. Wizards of the Coast has cemented these two elements together by suggesting that each game feature the exchange of one, randomly selected, card from winner to loser. This means that beginners are constantly losing cards to the ever-growing decks of more experienced players—assuring a constant demand for more booster packs.

With its combination of playability and collectability, *Magic: The Gathering* seems poised to take the top spot in fantasy games. If it does so, it will be attributable to both the cleverness of the folks at Wizards of the Coast, and the readiness of the gaming market to embrace something new after decades of me-too role-playing. Just how popular is this game? Try over 130 million cards shipped, another 300 million ordered, and a projected one billion sold by the end of the year. That, folks, is one heck of a lot of cardboard.

This popularity hasn't gone unnoticed in other segments of the science fiction and fantasy field. Later this year, Harper Collins will publish the first *Magic: The Gathering* Book. In '95, a trilogy of additional books should appear. Wizards of the Coast has started a new magazine, *The Duelist*, which features articles, playing tips, and *Magic*-based fiction. They're following the current game with a new game, *Jyhad*, which is based on the popular Vampire role-playing game from White Wolf.

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TROLL BRIDGE

Continued from page 63

I never saw her again. The trim woman with the taut smile was not the girl I had loved, and talking to her made me feel uncomfortable.

I MOVED TO LONDON, AND THEN, MANY years later, I moved back again, but the town I returned to was not the town I remembered: there were no fields, no farms, no little flint lanes; and I moved away as soon as I could, to a tiny village, ten miles down the road.

I moved with my family—I was married by now, with a toddler—into an old house that had once, many years before, been a railway station. The tracks had been dug up,

passed me, traveling to and from London. Once I tripped on a branch, half hidden in a heap of brown leaves, ripping my trousers, cutting my leg.

I reached the next village. There was a river at right angles to the road and a path I'd never seen before beside it, and I walked down the path and stared at the river, partly frozen. It gurgled and splashed and sang.

The path led off through fields; it was straight and grassy.

I found a rock, half buried, on one side of the path. I picked it up, brushed off the mud. It was a melted lump of purplish stuff, with a strange rainbow sheen to it. I put it into the pocket of my coat and held it in my hand as I walked, its presence warm and reassuring.

The river meandered across the fields, and I walked on in silence.

I had walked for an hour before I saw

were wide and lonely.

I shrugged, then wiped my face with the sleeve of my coat. "I came back."

Three kids passed above us on the bridge, shouting and running.

"I'm a troll," whispered the troll, in a small, scared voice. "Fol rol de ol rol."

He was trembling.

I held out my hand, and took his huge, clawed paw in mine. I smiled at him. "It's okay," I told him. "Honestly. It's okay."

The troll nodded.

He pushed me to the ground, onto the leaves and the wrappers and the condom, and lowered himself on top of me. Then he raised his head, and opened his mouth, and ate my life with his strong sharp teeth.

WHEN HE WAS FINISHED, THE TROLL STOOD up and brushed himself down. He put his

H

E PUSHED ME TO THE GROUND, onto the leaves and the wrappers and the condom, and lowered himself on top of me. Then he raised his head, and opened his mouth, and ate my life with his strong sharp teeth. When he was finished, the troll stood up and brushed himself down.

and the old couple who lived opposite us used it to grow vegetables.

I was getting older. One day I found a gray hair; on another, I heard a recording of myself talking, and I realized I sounded just like my father.

I was working in London, doing A & R for one of the major record companies. I was commuting into London by train most days, coming back some evenings.

I had to keep a small flat in London; it's hard to commute when the bands you're checking out don't even stagger onto the stage until midnight. It also meant that it was fairly easy to get laid, if I wanted to, which I did.

I thought that Eleanora—that was my wife's name; I should have mentioned that before, I suppose—didn't know about the other women; but I got back from a two-week jaunt to New York one winter's day, and when I arrived at the house it was empty and cold.

She had left a letter, not a note. Fifteen pages, neatly typed, and every word of it was true. Including the PS, which read: *You really don't love me. And you never did.*

I put on a heavy coat, and I left the house and just walked, stunned and slightly numb.

There was no snow on the ground, but there was a hard frost, and the leaves crunched under my feet as I walked. The trees were skeletal black against the harsh gray winter sky.

I walked down the side of the road. Cars

houses—new and small and square—on the embankment above me.

And then I saw the bridge, and I knew where I was: I was on the old railway path, and I'd been coming down it from the other direction.

There were graffiti painted on the side of the bridge: *Fuck* and *Barry Loves Susan* and the omnipresent *NF* of the National Front.

I stood beneath the bridge, in the red brick arch, stood among the ice cream wrappers, and the crisp packets and the single, sad, used condom, and watched my breath steam in the cold afternoon air.

The blood had dried into my trousers.

Cars passed over the bridge above me; I could hear a radio playing loudly in one of them.

"Hello?" I said, quietly, feeling embarrassed, feeling foolish. "Hello?"

There was no answer. The wind rustled the crisp packets and the leaves.

"I came back. I said I would. And I did. Hello?"

Silence.

I began to cry then, stupidly, silently, sobbing under the bridge.

A hand touched my face, and I looked up.

"I didn't think you'd come back," said the troll.

He was my height now, but otherwise unchanged. His long gonk hair was unkempt and had leaves in it, and his eyes

hand into the pocket of his coat, and pulled out a bubbly, burnt lump of clinker rock.

He held it out to me.

"This is yours," said the troll.

I looked at him: wearing my life comfortably, easily, as if he'd been wearing it for years. I took the clinker from his hand, and sniffed it. I could smell the train from which it had fallen, so long ago. I gripped it tightly in my hairy hand.

"Thank you," I said.

"Good luck," said the troll.

"Yeah. Well. You too."

The troll grinned with my face.

It turned its back on me and began to walk back the way I had come, toward the village, back to the empty house I had left that morning; and it whistled as it walked.

I've been here ever since. Hiding. Waiting. Part of the bridge.

I watch from the shadows as the people pass: walking their dogs, or talking, or doing the things that people do. Sometimes people pause beneath my bridge, to stand, or piss, or make love. And I watch them, but say nothing; and they never see me.

Fol rol de ol rol.

I'm just going to stay here, in the darkness under the arch. I can hear you all out there, trip-trapping, trip-trapping over my bridge.

Oh yes, I can hear you.

BUT I'M NOT COMING OUT. ♣

MOVIES

Continued from page 20

add Ken's imagination strongly to that mix. That particular image you mentioned is a very specific example where Berni Wrightson's visual interpretation of an event informed me while I was writing the screenplay. I wanted to work that image into the movie because I responded to it so strongly. There are other examples through the course of the script where I thought, here is an opportunity to really pull from Wrightson's illustrations. So I did.

ROF: We've talked about the influence of Wrightson, I think we also need to talk about Shelley's influence.

Darabont: Oh, very well.

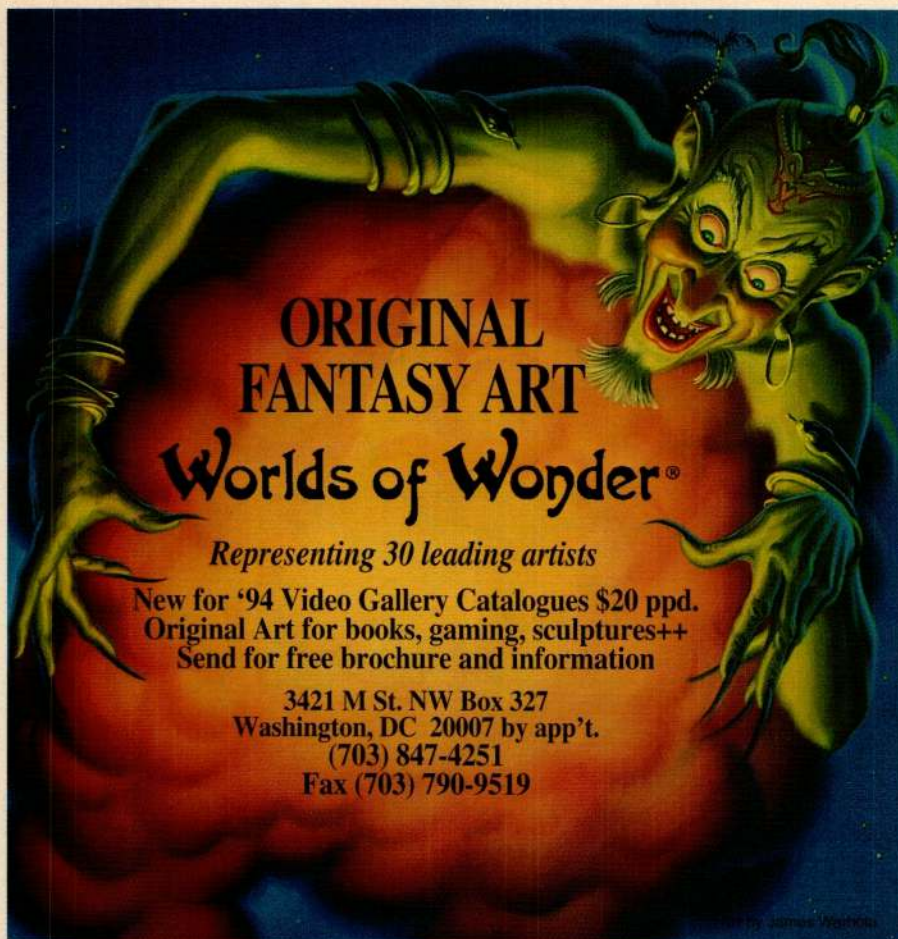
ROF: So much has been done with *Frankenstein* to date; did you have any trepidations when you were offered the project because of that?

Darabont: Not really. I felt that so little of it had been true to what Shelley wrote. It's a tricky novel to adapt because the storytelling conventions back then were so vastly different. Stephen King has pointed out that the book exists from coincidence to coincidence. It does. Back then it was a perfectly acceptable storytelling technique. It is really hard for a modern audience to relate to that sort of style. Working those coincidences out and blending in the narrative so that it all fits together was very tricky. I can see why other people shied away from those elements in other adaptations through the years.

ROF: As I was reading the dialogue it felt as if you were using some of the problems of that period to address some modern concerns, especially in the dialogue between Victor and Waldman.

Darabont: I think that the elements you refer to as contemporary, I view really more as timeless issues. In other words, those problems are certainly relevant to contemporary concerns as well—such as improving the quality of life by defeating disease. That, specifically, was my attempt to sort of ground the proceedings in a sense of reality. This way it's not just wacky Victor trying to make a monster, but Victor, dedicated physician, who is trying to explore the secrets of nature and to forestall death. This has been going on since medical science has been around. Edward Jenner did it with the smallpox vaccine. It was an enormous leap in its day, an absolutely unprecedented mode of thought. That's why I touched on it in the screenplay, because a detail like that would pin everything else to a backboard of reality.

It is an amazing book in so many ways, and it has so many thematic layers to it. The story is about the quest for knowledge and the dangers that it presents. We've seen that many times in fiction and reality. Shelley's *Frankenstein* is like the team that built the atomic bomb and changed the world by cre-



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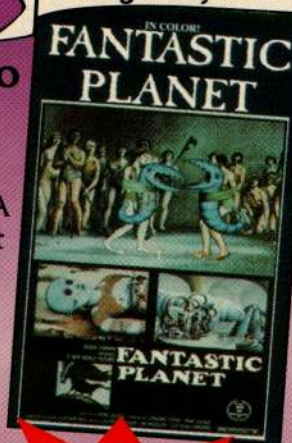
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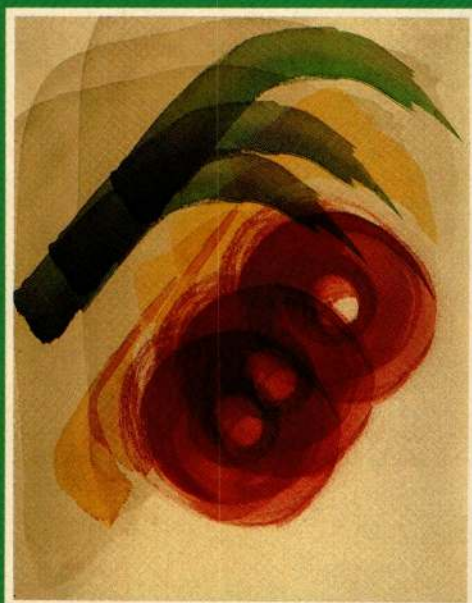
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ating a creature that could destroy us. It is amazing how prescient the book is, in that sense. It also works on a very human level because it is also about child abuse. It's about a father who cannot accept the responsibility of having created a child, taking care of it properly or teaching it. He abandons his child and there are consequences. These are not necessarily contemporary themes but



Robert DeNiro plays the Creature, seen here in one of the few stills of him released prior to the movie's opening. Frankenstein's tragic creation is articulate, intelligent and terrifying.



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timeless themes. That's why it has been around so long.

ROF: Shelley's novel is rich with philosophical prose between Victor and his creature. How passionate were you about seeing some of that make it into the film?

Darabont: Those were my favorite scenes to write, by far.

ROF: Did you feel you would have problems getting that weighty material by the studio?

Darabont: The studio didn't seem to have a problem with that. They seemed to be quite thrilled that we were taking a different tack. Certainly, Ken wanted very much to be true to that. The eloquence, the longing and the soul-searching of this creature were important to us, because he really represents all of us. The scene in the ice cave is basically man meeting God face-to-face and saying, "Excuse me, what were you thinking? Why am I here and why did you make me?" All of humankind goes through that sort of seeking. Human history is full of it and Mary Shelley was able to actually physicalize that in a scene between the living creature and creator. It was such a cool scene to write.

ROF: Did you have the chance to see the screenplay go through the cinematic process?

Darabont: No, not at all. It wasn't a snub on anyone's part, it was simply the fact that as soon as I handed the script in, I was doing

casting and pre-production on *The Shawshank Redemption*. We shot in Mansfield, Ohio, which involved my being there for nearly half of the year, and then back to L.A. for post-production. I was really not able to keep up with *Frankenstein* at all, because my hands were so full. Oddly enough, the studio was rather gracious because they invited me to come down to the Sony Studios lot, any day I felt like it, to watch dailies as they were shooting the film. I couldn't take them up on it because I was in the editing room pretty much all day cutting my movie together. The one thing that I did get to do, before they started shooting, was to see the makeup tests they shot with DeNiro, which looked pretty damn fabulous to me.

ROF: Given the slant of the screenplay, I would assume they're going for a very organic look for the creature.

Darabont: Very much so, very realistic. It's not Boris Karloff with the bolts and flat head, which is a wonderful iconographic image; you can show that picture to anyone in our culture and they can tell you what it is. However, it is of its time. This creature design is much more of a realistic, organic approach. Robert DeNiro looks like he is sewn together from various pieces of body, and it is a very smart and canny approach. They don't shy away from the horror of what such a person would look like.

ROF: Having read the screenplay, I have to say it is one of the most well fleshed out, smooth, and literate screenplays I've read in a long time. Would you like to see it published as is, even getting the license to use Berni's artwork?

Darabont: I'd love to, sure. Are you kidding? That would be the ultimate compliment to a screenwriter. I don't know that it will happen. I noticed when they published the *Dracula* screenplay that they published a very dry sort of shooting/continuity draft rather than Jim Hart's screenplay. As far as reading material goes, that original screenplay is far superior to a continuity draft. Nobody wants to read directions on camera angles and shots. Screenwriters don't do that crap any more. We sit there and write the scene and work on the characters. As far as all the technical stuff, I have no idea why that was injected into the published version of the *Dracula* screenplay. I'm sure they would do the same thing with this as well.

ROF: Or the screenplay may be novelized...

Darabont: I love it. Here we are taking a classic book, turning it into a movie and doing the novelization of the movie. There is something incredibly crass about that. I had nothing to do with that. I wonder if someone actually said, "Let's novelize Mary Shelley's novel." It is so funny to me. The one thing I really do appreciate is that they are also republishing Mary Shelley's novel as a tie-in, which is great. That is the least of what should be ignored, after all it is the source material. ♪

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PEST CONTROL

Continued from page 39

Barry sighed and bowed to the inevitable. "Will the chemicals hurt the lawn?"

Sherman frowned. "Chemicals? Oh, this. These aren't chemicals."

"What is it, then?"

"A flamethrower."

THE FIRE DEPARTMENT was a lot less understanding this time, and the O'Malleys weren't mollified until Barry promised not only to pay for the damage, but to make sure their new dog had all its shots. But the worst part of it was hearing the trolls laughing at him.

"I really thought that would do the trick," Sherman said.

"Well, you'd have to keep your...fairy dust from going anywhere. And promise not to leer at my daughter or die in my wife's brassieres." "That was Elvis," Egbert said. "He always was a bit of an embarrassment."

"That's it!" Barry said. "You're fired! I don't want to see you again!"

"I guess you're a little bothered by all this," said Sherman. "I don't blame you. But you see, Baxter, there are always things you don't expect." Sherman got into his van. "Don't worry, Baxter. I'm on the right track now. I'll have everything fixed tomorrow."

"There won't be any tomorrow! I don't want to see you again!"

Sherman nodded. "I'll see you then."

"I won't pay you! I won't give you a cent!"

Sherman glared at him. "You think this has anything to do with money? My professional honor is at stake now. I'm not going to quit until those trolls are gone for good."

"But—"

The van roared off.

BARRY TOOK A NAP AFTER dinner, hoping to get a little sleep before the evening's cacophony so that he'd have some strength to deal with Sherman the next day.

He had just dropped off when something bashed into his nose.

He opened his bleary eyes. Two elves stood in front of his face, both wearing green pin-stripe suits and fedoras. One of them held a 2-millimeter-long blackjack.

"You trying to muscle in on us, bud?" one elf asked.

"Muscle in?"

"This is *our* territory. You try to get rid of us and you'll end up sleeping with the goldfishes."

"I'd settle for sleeping *anywhere* right now," Barry mumbled.

"Oh," said the elf, flipping a coin in his hand. "A wise guy, huh? Think you're a big man, do you?"

"Well—"

"Egbert," whispered the second elf. "He is a big man."

"Quiet," Egbert snapped.

"But he is big. A lot bigger than any of us."

Egbert looked annoyed. "Look, Sousay, I'm trying to *intimidate* someone, if you don't mind."

Sousay was looking at Barry. "He's at least 10 times our size."

"Sousay..."

"What is this all about?" Barry asked.

"Well, I was trying to scare you so that you'd leave us alone," said Egbert. "But *some*

people don't seem to understand the idea."

"Maybe 20 times," said Sousay.

Egbert looked toward the heavens. "All right, buster," he said to Barry. "As I was saying, this is *our* turf and—"

"They were here first," Sousay pointed out.

"I know they were here first," Egbert snapped.

"But if they were here first, how can it be our turf?"

Egbert rubbed his face with his hand. "Why me?" he said.

"It just doesn't make sense," Sousay said.

"Look, fellows," Barry said. "I don't care whose turf this is. Hell, if you could get rid of those damn trolls, I'd be glad to let you stay."

"Really?" Egbert asked.

The speed with which he answered made Barry cautious. "Well, you'd have to keep your...fairy dust from going anywhere. And promise not to leer at my daughter or die in my wife's brassieres."

"That was Elvis," Egbert said. "He always was a bit of an embarrassment."

"You can stay in the attic; we never go up there. But you still have to get rid of the trolls."

"Simple as pie," said Egbert.

"Have you ever tried to make a pie?" asked Sousay. "It's not as easy as you think."

"Quiet." Egbert turned back to Barry. "All you have to do is give the trolls what they're

looking for."

"I've heard that before. But they're looking for the Mountain King's ring of power."

Egbert looked amazed. "Why would they want that old thing for? It's not even real gold. And they misspelled 'power' on it."

"You've seen it?"

"Sure. We've got it."

"But it's been lost for centuries!"

Egbert nodded. "Never know when something might come in handy, do you?"

Barry remembered what Sherman had said: pack rats, the bunch of them.

"So, it's a deal?" asked Egbert.

Barry nodded.

"Shouldn't we get it in writing?" asked Sousay. "It's not legal if we don't get it in writing."

I'M ALL SET," SHERMAN SAID, GETTING out of his van. "The DYNAMITE will definitely do the trick." He held up his hand. "Now, I understand how it just may be possible that you don't quite trust me on this, but I'll only be using one or two sticks and—"

"They're gone," said Barry.

"Gone?"

"They packed up in the middle of the night." The noise had stopped at 9:47 exactly.

"Well, I'd better take a look. After all, I am the expert."

Sherman made a slow, careful inspection, then returned. "It looks like you're right, Baxter. They must have known I meant business." He rubbed his hands together. "Now I can give my full attention to the elves."

It was the last thing Barry wanted. "I don't think they're around anymore. I mean, did Gus catch any in the traps?"

Sherman rubbed his chin. "No," he said cautiously. He brightened. "Maybe it was just the dead one he found on the step."

Barry nodded.

"Well, then," said Sherman. "A job well done, I say."

"Yes, I guess you *would* say that."

Sherman climbed back into his van. "Glad to be of service, Baxter. And remember: If you have vermin, call Sherman."

"I assure you, Mr. Sherman, I will never forget that as long as I live."

Jane and Caroline came out of the house as Sherman was starting his van. "Is it over, Barry?" Jane asked.

Barry nodded. "I think so."

Jane shook her head. "Good. I never want to see that exterminator ever again."

Caroline shrugged. "I don't know. Gus was very nice."

Barry smiled at her. All was right with the world; the day was peaceful and quiet.

Very quiet.

Barry listened, but the silence continued, making him more and more concerned.

"Caroline?" he said.

"Yes, Daddy?"

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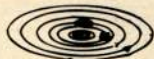
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BOOKS

Continued from page 16

captained by Edward Bryant, one of our best authors going. It is, of course, highly intelligent and perceptive since Ed cannot help but be both of those things, but his treatment of some of the atrocious garbage spewed onto the silver screen during the last year struck me as being, perhaps, just a tad too considerate of its perpetrators. Of course there is more than the flash of a fang lurking in his kindly smile during some of his gentle admonitions, so maybe it's just that he's better than I am at concealing rage.

Skin, by Kathe Koja, Dell Publishing, NY, 389 pp., Paperback \$4.99.

The further off in time we glide from the '60s, the more it takes on a golden glow of Woodstockian sunlight and, as the focus grows yearly softer with nostalgia, the warmer and fuzzier it seems to get. But even at the time, there was—there really truly was—a pervasive if somewhat pathetic hopefulness about it: all those wide if unclean smiles, the V signs with their dirty fingernails held high and proud and friendly, the clothing soiled and scruffy but made up of the gypsy-brightest fabrics that could be bought or scrounged or stolen. Things were going to work out. Enough love and the world would get well again, man. You wait and see.

True, there was a lot of self destruction, what with drugs and booze and astoundingly filthy living, a lot; but I think most of it took place because of sheer stupidity. I do believe it simply wasn't generally grasped that all that acid tripping and unsafe sex could actually get you into trouble. It came as a great surprise to many of my friends and acquaintances to discover they had ruined their bodies or even arranged their deaths, and I know for a fact I was astonished at the damage I'd done to myself.

Now, as Koja makes horrendously clear, it's different. The rebels are still brave, still valiant, still risking their lives to make their point, but the rheostat's been torn off the wall and all hope of a cure for the world has fled. The self-rendering has become much more purposeful and conscious.

However, and most importantly, Koja also makes it clear, and thrillingly so, that even the world coming to its end does not mean art is dead or injured or even in trouble. We need not fear: the painters and sculptors and dancers and musicians and writers and the whole lot of them are as driven and obsessed as ever they were. They will not stop.

The truth, the awful secret, the reason why the bourgeois may be absolutely right to mistrust and even fear Bohemians, could well be that in their heart of hearts, artists don't really want to give a damn what shape the world is in; all they really want to do is get it down on paper, make it into a statue, play it on a piano or show how it moves with their body.

There are two heroines in *Skin*. It's told from the point of view of Tess Bajac, a sculptor, but I don't feel Koja means us to feel she's a hair more or less important than the other heroine, Bibi Bloss, who is a dancer. Great names, both.

At the beginning of the book Tess is an artist of the totally isolated variety. All by herself she treks to junkyards in her roll-down pants and baseball cap so she can gather up scraps of metal and plastic and cart them away in a canvas sack. Then she can put on her welder's goggles and melt the scrap together into angels with wings like knives or a *Mater Intranscens* with razored ribs and a crown of sheared bearings.

An unimportant man brings Bibi into her life and when she sees Tess' work, she immediately wants it to move and to dance with it. She persuades Tess to join her as a partner and together they form the Surgeons of the Demolition, which puts on a series of fantastic entertainments wherein monstrous robotic creatures built by Tess cavort with Bibi's dance troupe, spouting artificial blood in various grim environments to the sounds of screams and explosions and fantastic music and the increasing adulation of ever larger crowds of fans.

Koja is obviously knowledgeable about this world, and her depiction of the growing success of the Surgeons' is clear and convincing. Their accumulating successes make Tess and Bibi legends, works of art themselves, drawing both good and bad people who want to add themselves to the general creation. And there the contamination starts. The teeth of the story show as esthetic mutilators mince gracefully in and, gradually, replace the Surgeons artificial blood with the real stuff and the accidental scratches and cuts with nicely calculated slicings.

Koja does a meticulous job of creating a varied and marvelously decadent pantheon of cutters starting with Linda Joy, a sort of nightclub entertainer who lures Bibi into the early stages of disfigurement; and going on to Andreas (my personal favorite), a tackily elegant courtier type whose black rubber gloves and disinfectants sadly now and then fail to forestall nasty little problems with pus.

Throughout all this, *Skin* is a love story and a very moving one. I'll avoid detailed discussion of that side of the plot line. Suffice it to say, there is a marvelously effective traitorous villain, and that the general overall bitchery and needless cruelties which thwart, confuse, and frustrate the lovers are precisely the sort you experience routinely if you hang around art galleries. Sorry to be the one to break the news.

Skin is a very sad story, to be sure, but it does a fine job of making it clear that for all the miserably petty exploiters it seems to attract, and for all the miseries, self- and otherwise inflicted, which its suffering practitioners often find themselves undergoing, Art, whatever that may be, is worth it all and can survive it all.

Including the poor artist. ☺

ROGER ZELAZNY HAS WRITTEN approximately 200 short stories, articles and poems published in numerous anthologies and such magazines as *Science Fiction Age*, *Amazing Stories*, *Analog*, *IASF*, *Science Fiction Digest*, to name just a few. He has won the Hugo Award six times and the Nebula Award three times. His Amber novels are currently under film option and there have been computer and role-playing games based on these books. Sunset Productions is publishing the Amber novels in audiobook form.

Terri Windling is a writer and painter who has worked extensively with myth and fairy tale themes. She is also a five-time winner of the World Fantasy Award for her editorial work, which includes the annual *Year's Best Fantasy & Horror* collection (co-edited with Ellen Datlow, St. Martin's Press) and many other anthologies and book series. She divides her time between homes in Devon, England and in Tucson, Arizona.

Neil Gaiman is the author of the award-winning *Sandman* series (including the amazing issue about a serial killer convention based on SF/F conventions), and the graphic novels *Violent Cases*. He is working on a very scary book for children. Gaiman says that "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" was his favorite fairy tale as a child. In his own version there's only one "billy goat," and while it seems to be about escaping a troll, the story actually speaks of lost chances.

Chuck Rothman's short stories have appeared in *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, *Galaxy*, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and *Tomorrow Speculative Fiction*, among other places. His novel, *Staroamer's Fate*, was published in 1986. He does desktop publishing for an investment firm and lives in Schenectady, NY, with his wife, poet Susan Noe Rothman, and daughter Lisa. As a homeowner, he's had his share of problems with people he's hired to do work for him, but the trolls are now under control.

Gary Lippencot illustrates childrens books and is breaking into book covers in the young adult fantasy field, recently creating the cover art for Bruce Corwille's books. He lives on a horse farm in Central Massachusetts with his wife and children.



Chuck Rothman



Roger Zelazny

Mary O'Keefe Young's illustrations have appeared in eight children's books, greeting cards, magazines and ads. Her newest book, *Helen and the Hudson Hornet* will come out in the spring of 1995. Painting fantasy portraits is her passion.

Sara Zettel is a technical writer who lives and works in Michigan. When she's not writing (which isn't very often), she dances, sings, tells stories and plays the hammered dulcimer, but generally not all at once.

Billie Sue Mosiman lives in the country north of Houston on an acre of land surrounded by woods. Her novel *Widow*, published by Berkley Press will be out in April 1995. She enjoys gardening, computer games and travel.



Jean Lorrach



Billie Sue Mosiman

MARK SUMNER IS THE AUTHOR of six young adult novels, including *The Dark* recently released by Harper. He has a house in the Ozarks perched on the ugliest patch in three states.

The former editor of *Starshore*, **Richard Rowand** makes his home in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. His current projects include working on a novel and editing *The Whether Report; A Journal on the Art Craft & Feeling of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror*.

Jean Lorrach is the creator of the *Savage Empire* series and has also written *Sime/Gen* and *Star Trek* novels. She is Professor of English at Murray State University in Kentucky.

Gahan Wilson's cartoons are known chiefly because of his association with *Playboy*, but have shown up in periodicals as diverse as *The New Yorker*, *Weird Tales*, *Gourmet*, *Punch*, *Paris Match* and the cover of *Newsweek*. He's also written a number of childrens' books in addition to spooky stories and mysteries for grownups.

He's recently begun experiments in two new fields: the comic book form, having done books on Poe and Ambrose Bierce with new projects underway, and in films he recently completed his first animated movie, a gruesome cartoon short for 20th Century Fox called *Gahan Wilson's Diner*, and a ROM disk interactive game called *Gahan Wilson's Haunted House* will be out this year. 🐾

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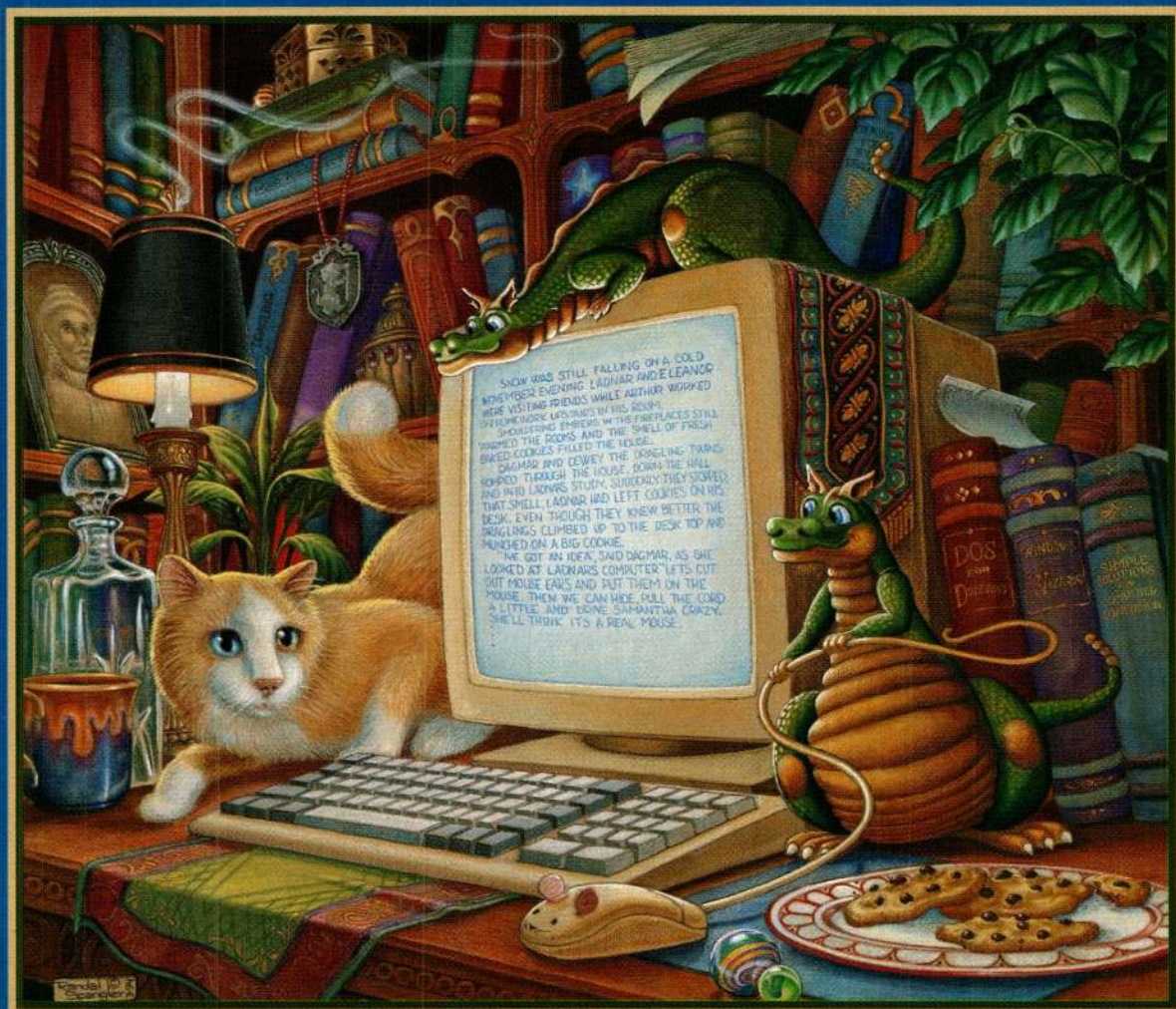
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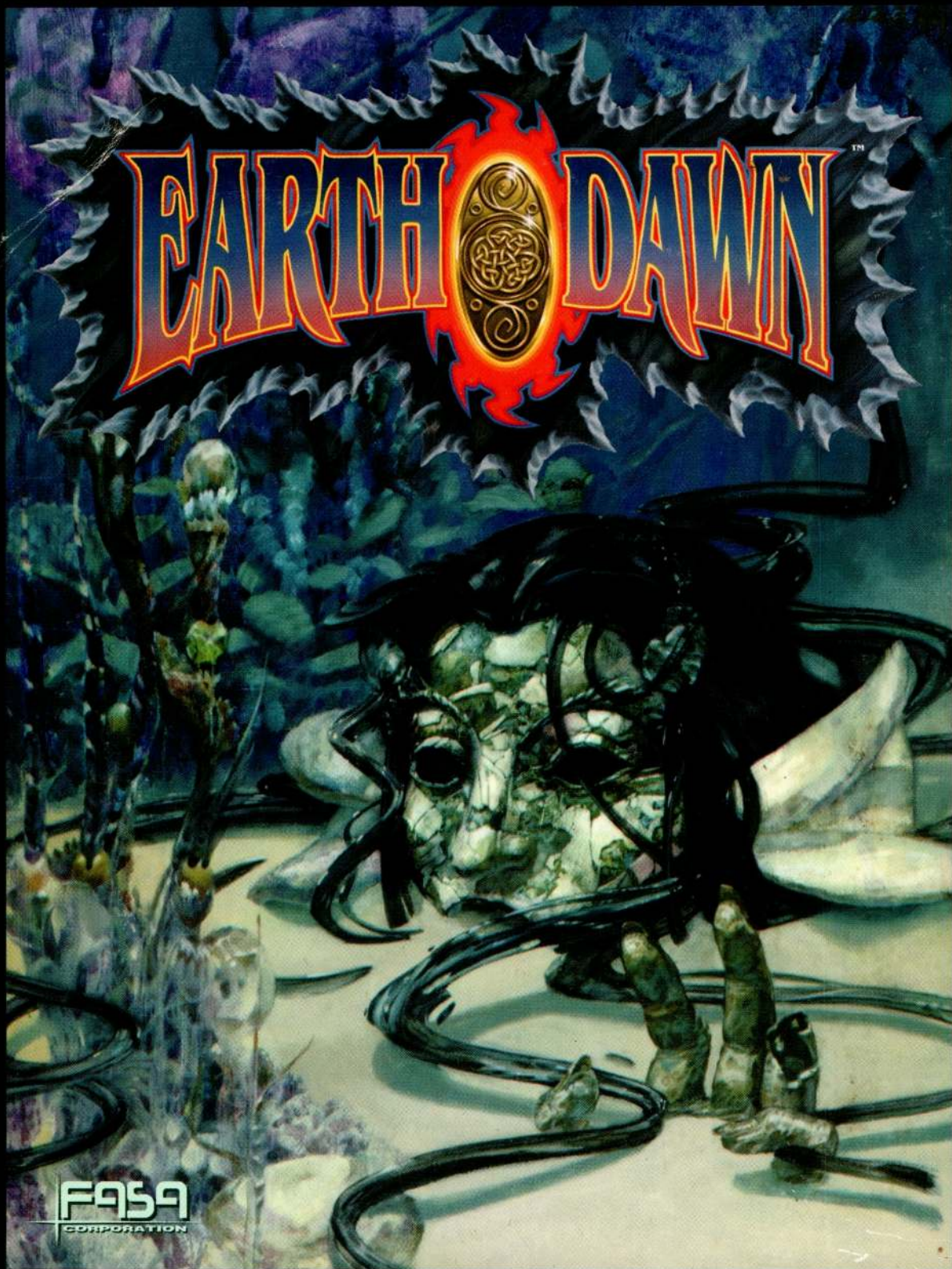
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